

# **A Book Review of Bill Bryson's a Walk in the Woods**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The writer intends to review Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods*. The novel is one of the examples of literary nonfiction. Published in 1998 by Anchor Books, this novel instantly became the best seller book according to *New York Times*. Moreover in 2015 *A Walk in the Woods* became a film adaptation with the same title starting Robert Redford and Nick Nolte.

*A Walk in the Woods* is a true story about the author's experience crossed the Appalachian Trail. Bill Bryson's book consists of twenty one chapters that mostly talk about his experience, history and information about Appalachian Trail. In his novel he starts to collect the information about Appalachian Trail from the book and from experts, buy things for hiking and invite hiking companions. Stephen Katz accepted Bryson's invitation to cross the Appalachian Trail. However, the interesting fact is neither Katz nor Bryson has experience of hiking. Their journey will be their first experience of hiking and they choose the hardest one.

I decided to choose *A Walk in the Woods* as my final project because it is my favorite book. This seventh book from Bill Bryson is truly inspirational for

everyone who wants to travel. He is not only telling us about his experience but he also gives us the education about the places that he passed it when hiking on Appalachian Trail.

## **2. SUMMARY OF A WALK IN THE WOODS**

Appalachian Trail is the longest hiking trail in the world with 2,100 miles along America's eastern seaboard. This trail is famous because of its amazing view along the trail and the hard challenging trail for the hikers. It is managed by the National Park Service, the nonprofit Appalachian Trail Conservancy and United States Forest Service. The majority of the trail is in forest or wild lands, although some portions of the trail cross towns, roads and farms in the eastern United States.

Unfortunately, the climate change or is known as the global warming slowly ruin the magnificent scenery of the AT. Moreover, the global warming can affect the extinction of flora and fauna in the AT. Therefore, many people want to cross the AT before the climate change destruct the AT even more and one of them is Bill Bryson.

Bill Bryson recently moved to New Hampshire with his family. Suddenly he had the crazy idea to pass the Appalachian Trail without training and experience. He only knows the Appalachian Trail from the books that he bought.

Then for the next move, he invited his friends to join him to cross the trail, but only one person responded his invitation nicely, and that person is Stephen Katz. Katz is an old friend of Bill Bryson, and he also had been travelled with Bryson to Europe.

Neither Bryson nor Katz has the experience of hiking before and that can be a problem for both of them. The beginning of their journey is very hard. It is because both of them did not get used to carry the heavy weight and walk at the same time. Moreover, they have to face the unexpected weather, blister and all hiking problems. Their routes start from Springer Mountain. Furthermore, their carry on into Hiawasse, Franklin, Smoky Mountains National Park, Roanoke, Waynesboro, Rockfish Gap, Shenandoah National Park, Skyland and Front Royal.

Unfortunately, they cannot continue their journey to Mount Katahdin until August. They have to get back to reality to finish their job. Bill has to get back to New Hampshire to promote his book and Katz has a job offer for the summer building houses. Waiting for August to come, Bill continues his journey in the first week of June to Harpers Ferry by himself. He walks until Pennsylvania and feeling lonely. This journey would not be the same without Katz. Luckily for the next destination which is Mount Washington, his neighbor is willing to be his company so he feels little bit relief.

The time that Katz and Bill have waited to start their journey finally comes. Early August they get back together to finish the trail to Maine. The trails in Maine are difficult. They have to cross the river with heavy weight, and it is

also slippery. Moreover, Katz gets lost when Bill arrived in Cloud Pond. Bill becomes worried about Katz because he does not have map and drink. However, Bill continues to walk and hope that he will find Katz. He finds Katz stuff and he begins to search him. Finally he found Katz injured. They decided to stop their journey because they cannot take it anymore. They did not make it to walk until 2,200 miles, but they are still proud of themselves because at least they try to make it this far.

### **3. REVIEW OF A WALK IN THE WOODS**

In this chapter I present the strengths and the weaknesses of *A Walk in the Woods*.

#### **3.1. The Strength of Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods***

##### **3.1.1 Educative**

Bryson in his book not only recounts his journey crossing the Appalachian Trail but also give knowledge of Appalachian Trail. One example is information relating to flora and fauna that can be found in the Appalachian Trail. When Bryson passed Smoky Mountains National Park, he explained that the Smoky Mountains National Park has varieties of fauna:

*The Smokies are home to sixty-seven varieties of mammal, over 200 types of bird, and eighty species of reptile and amphibian. (Bryson, 1998:128)*

Smoky Mountains National Park is a home to a wide variety of species of fauna. Moist climate caused many varieties of fauna can be found in the Smoky Mountains National Park. Moist climate could occur in the Smoky Mountains National Park because the Appalachian Trail mark in Smoky Mountains National Park is located on the border of North Carolina and Tennessee. We can meet salamanders, white-tailed deer, black bear, raccoon, wild turkey, woodchuck, and other animals in The Smokies.

However, Smoky Mountains National Park is famous for its bears and salamanders that live there. About 1,500 bears live and be protected in the Smoky Mountains National Park so the American Black Bear became a symbol for the Smokies. Furthermore, Bryson explained there are thirty species of salamanders in the park, so the Smoky Mountains National Park earned the epithet of Salamander Capital of the World:

*The true creature of the Smokies, however, is the reclusive and little appreciated salamander. (Bryson, 1998:130)*

There are thirty varieties of salamanders in the Smokies, more than anywhere else on the earth. Salamanders are interesting species. They are the oldest of all land vertebrates. Most salamanders are small, only an inch or two long, but the rare Hellbender salamander can attain lengths of over two feet.

Bryson not only describes the fauna that we can see on the Appalachian Trail, but also flora that live there. Examples such as camellia and Franklinia Altamaha:

*In 1765, John Bartram discovered a particularly lovely camellia, Franklinia Altamaha; already rare, it was hunted to extinction in just twenty-five years. Today it survives only cultivation thanks entirely to Bartram. (Bryson, 1998:169)*

Camellia and Altamaha Franklinia first found by John Bartam. Camellia and Franklinia Altamaha are rare small tree native to the southern Appalachian region. Camellia in the Appalachian region distantly related to evergreen Camellias in Asia as well Franklinia Altamaha which has close relations with the Asian genera Schima.

Bryson did not only stop at the explanation of flora and fauna that can be found on the Appalachian Trail, but also discuss some more about how the process of formation of the Appalachian Trail:

*The Appalachians were formed in three long phases (or orogenies, as geologists like to call them) known as the Taconic, Acadian, and Alleghanian. The first two were essentially responsible for northern Appalachians, the third for the central and southern Appalachians. (Bryson, 1998:273)*

Bryson explained the process of formation of the Appalachians Trail as introduction to Geology. Taconic, Acadian and Alleghanian are very long phases of the Appalachian Trail around 450 to 200 million years ago.

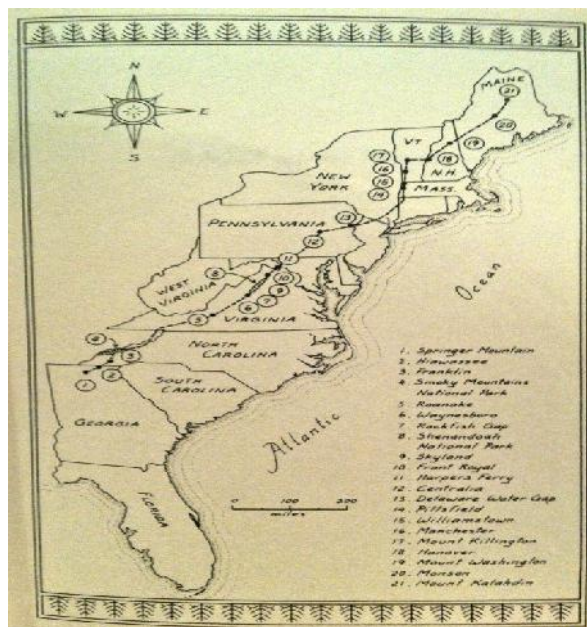
Bryson gives the readers a good point in an educative way through information about flora, fauna, and Geological sciences aspects relating to the Appalachian Trail. His information is clear and not too long. These twenty-one

chapters book not only contain a long story of Bill crossing the Appalachian Trail, but also give knowledge of the Appalachian Trail.

### 3.2. The Weakness of Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods*

#### 3.2.2. Unaccomplished Main Goal

Appalachian Trail is the longest hiking trail in the world with 2,100 Miles along America's eastern seaboard. The start point to begin the journey along the Appalachian Trail came from Springer Mountain in Georgia to the finish limit, Maine, in New England:



Source: *A Walk in the Woods*

To complete the Appalachian Trail, hiker must pass twenty-one points as shown in the map above. From Georgia to Maine, passing through fourteen states and hills such as Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberlands, Green Mountains and the White Mountains.

Bryson know if he wants to cross the Appalachian Tail he must pass through twenty-one points that starts from Springer Mountain and ends in Maine. He had decided to hike and mindlessly he announced his intention to many people to hike the Appalachian Trail:

*So I decided to do it. More rashly, I announced my intention to my friends and neighbors, confidently informed my publisher made it common knowledge among those who knew me. (Bryson, 1998:5)*

Bryson's decision is very suddenly and mindlessly. He realized that he was not a professional hiker, had no training anything before climbing and realized that this was way beyond anything he had attempted before. However, he continues his journey crossing the Appalachian Trail with his best friend Katz, who is also not a professional hiker.

However, at the end of the story Bryson denies his published statement he would finish the Appalachian Trail:

*I had done 870 miles, considerably less than half the AT. (Bryson, 1998:392)*

He did not meet his main goal and just past the 870 miles of 2,100 miles long of the Appalachian Trail.



Bryson himself was disappointed that in fact he did not finish what he started in accordance with expectations. He expressed his regret to not finish crossing the Appalachian Trail:

*I have regrets, of course. I regret that I didn't do Katahdin (though I will, I promise you, I will).* (Bryson, 1998:393)

He regrets that the journey across the Appalachian Trail has to stop at Mount Katahdin. He did not go on it again afterwards. Therefore, at the end of the story, the readers think that Bryson walk less than a half of a length of 2,100 miles the Appalachian Trail.

What readers get, however, is Bryson's memoir of his journey along the Appalachian Trail across the 870 Miles. He walked less than a half of the Appalachian Trail. At the beginning of the story he had been very confident to complete all trail and at the end of the story he told that he stopped at Katahdin mount. The reader are hoping this book will give the whole experience across the Appalachian Trail along the 2,100 miles, as he promised at the beginning of the story, instead of half way across the Appalachian Trail.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

*A Walk in the Woods* is one of the examples of nonfiction book. Published in 1998 by Anchor Books, this novel instantly became the best seller book according to *New York Times*. This book talks about Bryson experience crossing the Appalachian Trail. In his journey, Bryson was not alone he was accompanied by his friend Katz.

*A Walk in the Woods* is a good read. However, the readers still have to pay attention about what they read; the readers have to be critical if they want to find the strength and the weakness of the novel. Educative is the strength that writer found in *A Walk in the Woods*. This book is educative since not only contains Bryson's experience while crossing the Appalachian Trail, but also useful information about Appalachian Trail. Education he gave to the reader is anything we can find on the Appalachian Trail and how the process of the formation of the Appalachian Trail. Moreover, the information he gave is clear and understandable.

Apart from its strength which is mentioned above, *A Walk in the Woods* also has its weakness. The weakness of this book is Bryson's statement does not match for his end of journey. At the beginning of the book, he published to all parties that he will finish the Appalachian Trail. In fact, in the end of story he only completed half of the Appalachian Trail. It is disappointing since the readers expect they will get the full experience of Bryson crossing all the trails on the Appalachian Trail when buying this book, but they do not get it after all.

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