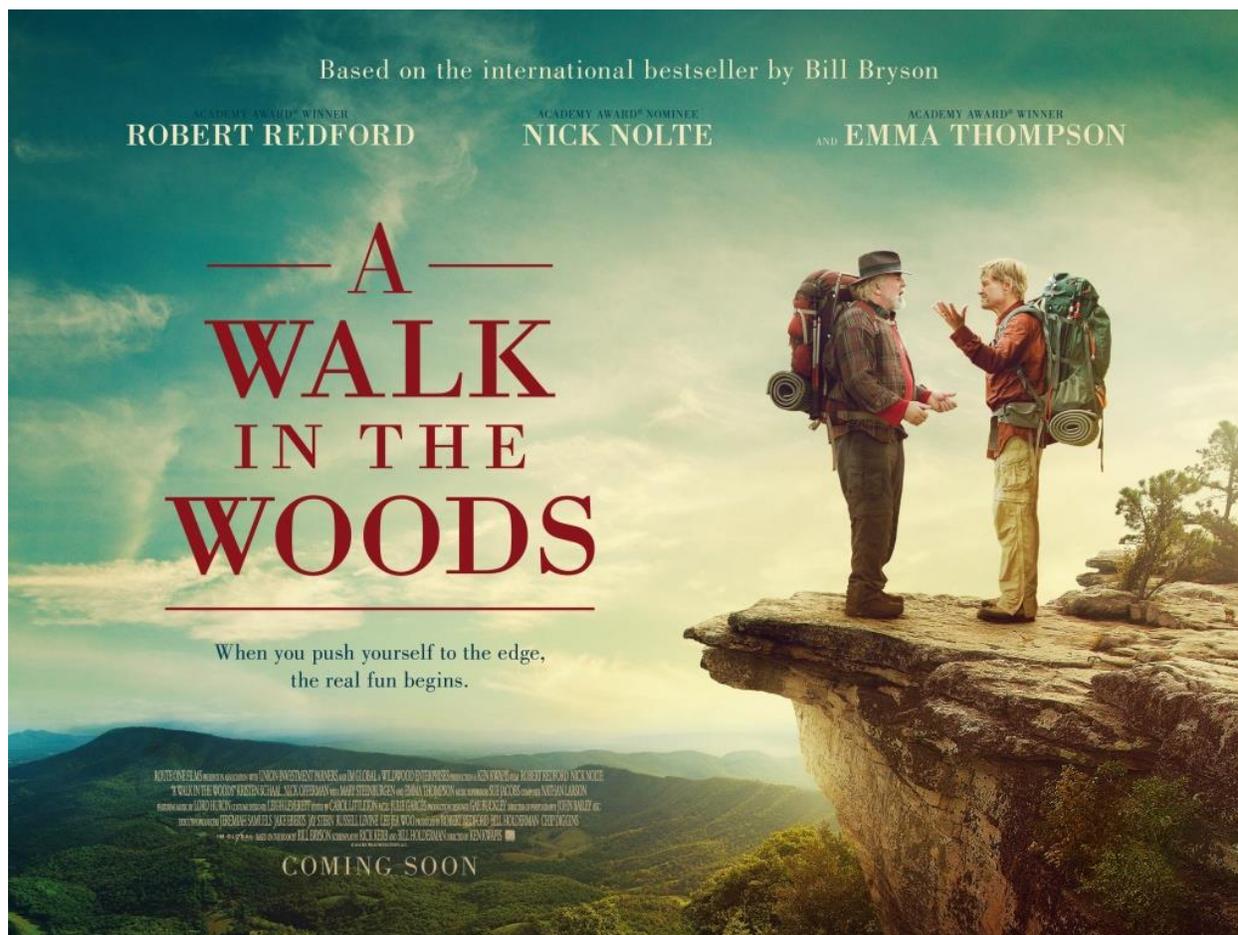


A Walk in the Woods



Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill

Directed by Ken Kwapis. Produced by Robert Redford, Chip Diggins & Bill Holderman. Executive Producer:s Russell Levine and several others. Production Design by Gae S. Buckley. Screenplay by Rick Kerb & Bill Holderman. Based on the 1997 book *A Walk In The Woods* by Bill Bryson. Photography by John Bailey. Editing by Julie Garces & Carol Litteton. Music by Nathan Larson. A Universal Pictures Production. Original Release: June 2015. R Rating for swearing and one brief sexual scene. Length: three different lengths are given: 98 minutes, 102 minutes & 104 minutes. Rating 80%

All images are taken from the public domain, Wikipedia and Wikimedia

Cast

Robert Redford : Bill Bryson

Steve Katz : Nick Nolte

Catherine Bryson : Emma Thompson

Jeanie the hotel owner: Mary Steenburgen

Mary Ellen the superiority freak : Katherine Schaal

Dave the camping gear seller: Nick Offerman

Sam Bryson : R. Keith Harris

The chat show host : Randall Newsome

Beulah : Susan McPhail

Beulah's Husband : John Kap

Taxi Driver 1 (Georgia) Danny Vinson

Taxi Driver 2 (Virginia ?) Nijema Williams

Georgia Mountain Waitress : Stephanie Astalos-Jones

Review

Bryson's 1997 book *A Walk In The Woods* forms the basis of this film, which as the title suggests with underestimation is about an attempt to walk the Appalachian Trail. Well over two thousand miles long, taking over a million footsteps, less than 10% of those who start in northern Georgia make it to the end in central Maine. Against his wife's wishes and advice, Bill Bryson decides that he will walk the trail. Virtually everybody advises him against it. The trail has a reputation for being gruelling, dangerous and time devouring. He is getting old and without the needed expertise. As a concession to his wife he agrees not to travel alone. The trouble begins when the only volunteer to accompany him turns out to be Stephen Katz, an old travelling companion from the days of their wild youth. Now in late middle age Bryson has become a staid and settled family man, while Katz remains a wild youth, but aging badly.



The happy hikers

A tactless recovering alcoholic, he also emerges as a compulsive womaniser and turns out to be on the run from warrants for minor charges. These are minor problems compared to the crucial ones, his ignorance about trekking and his physical condition. When he gets off the plane to meet Bryson he has a battle getting down the plane steps and ineptly bangs his head on a glass door, even though it has large writing on it.

Clearly the happy campers are heading for trouble, misadventure and excitement and it comes in Shakespeare's battalions of woe. Snowstorms, slippages, falls, roving bears, violently jealous husbands, instant experts and control freaks, over crowded bunkhouses with flimsy bed frames that go crash with people in them...

And yet there the trail itself emerges as the real star of the film. Astoundingly beautiful and varied in its beauty, this place can give serenity if you stop or provide something always happening if you go ahead.



The real star of the film, the trail

The film has gained a 57% success rating with the public and a failed 45% with the critics. Once again the public wins with this reviewer. Criticisms are usually along the lines that the film becomes slow, but so does walking the Appalachian trail. A fast paced film about walking the Appalachian Trail? That contradiction would hurtle the film into a mess. Do all films have to be fast-paced? Another invalid criticism must be that it is unclear why Bryson and then Katz want to walk the trail. Do all motivations have to be spelt out? Clues are there.

These criticism are worrying. It as if Hollywood has a formula nobody can depart from. Do all American films have to be fast paced with glaringly obvious motivations? What about explosions, nudity and fast speed car chases? *A Walk In The Woods* gives some welcome relief from the formula. If only the frequent sworn obscenities and the one brief spurious sexual scene had also vanished off screen. Why get an R rating for what could have been a good family movie?

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