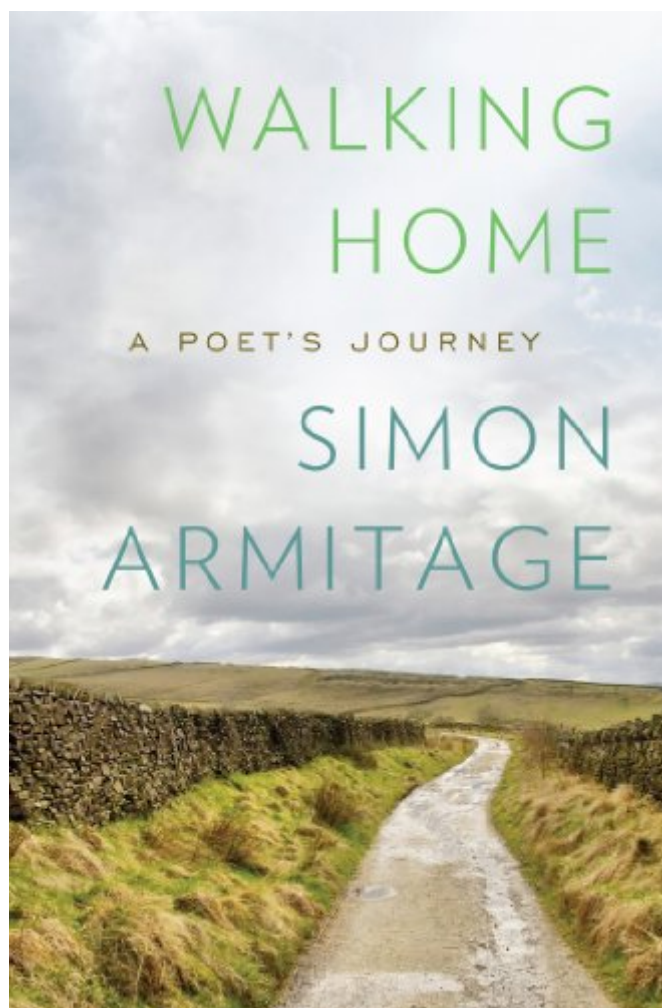


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Walking Home: A Poet's Journey: A Poet's Journey



Synopsis

Nineteen days, 256 miles, and one renowned poet walking the backbone of England. The wandering poet has always been a feature of our cultural imagination. Odysseus journeys home, his famous flair for storytelling seducing friend and foe. The Romantic poets tramped all over the Lake District searching for inspiration. Now Simon Armitage, with equal parts enthusiasm and trepidation, as well as a wry humor all his own, has taken on Britain's version of our Appalachian Trail: the Pennine Way. Walking "the backbone of England" by day (accompanied by friends, family, strangers, dogs, the unpredictable English weather, and a backpack full of Mars Bars), each evening he gives a poetry reading in a different village in exchange for a bed. Armitage reflects on the inextricable link between freedom and fear as well as the poet's place in our bustling world. In Armitage's own words, "to embark on the walk is to surrender to its lore and submit to its logic, and to take up a challenge against the self."

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Customer Reviews

WALKING HOME by Simon Armitage

Walking Home the Pennine Way is not a book of poems from this famous poet but a personal account of Simon Armitage's experience, walking one of the toughest climbs in Britain. He undertook this task, a walk that stretched about 256 miles, in the summer of 2010. The usual pattern, and the easier one, is to walk from south to north but not the other way round. Simon did it from Edale, his home village in the Peak District, Yorkshire, to the north Kirk Yetholm, the other side of the Scottish border. Tongue in cheek, he says, 'As a poet I am naturally contrary.' He takes up the challenge with a rucksack his mother used when she walked the route at the age of fifty; and his dad tells him he doesn't need a coat. His wife says if this is a midlife thing why not get a Harley and grow a ponytail. Armed with walking paraphernalia and 'Avon Skin So Soft' Simon sets out to take this endurance test, to face the emotional and physical challenge. He trains for the tough job with the motto 'prepare for day two by walking on day one'. Simon gives readings along the way at prearranged stops at villages and farms, in private homes, pubs, and churches. A modern troubadour travelling out without cash, passing a sock round for donations. At the stops his borrowed suitcase The Tombstone heavy with his volumes of poetry is delivered to him. The narrative is smooth, oftentimes contemplative. It flows beautifully and is filled with humour in spite of his discomfort of moors and bogs, the cold and the wet, the slush and the hard rock, and the bruising and deafening gusts. He perseveres through bleak terrain, across lonely fells towards his Yorkshire village. We see how different each of the farm villages and homes he arrives at are. Simon sees much beauty too and makes acute, detailed observations as only a poet can. A notification of readings on his website brings him a good crowd of passionate admirers and a mix too of indifferent audiences and farm animals. And readings have ended up in the middle of dart games, or had to compete with the sound of clacking pool balls or bleating of sheep. Simon is surprised by the crowds who turn up and is surprised too by the generosity of villagers and visitors. His rendition of happenings and his choice of words hilarious throughout the book had me laughing aloud. Often he writes with self-deprecating humour. At one evening reading - 'Towards the end, several people in the audience seem moved to tears, covering their eyes with their hands and bowing their heads. One woman takes a handkerchief out of her bag and lifts it to her face. But it's just the sun, setting directly behind my back, reducing me to flames.' As an armchair rambler I enjoy reading more than walking tough mountain trails but 'Waling Home' made me feel I wanted to join Simon Armitage on his walk. Walking Home warrants a second reading. I have developed a taste for tea and cake.

Found this book to be tremendously appealing. The author puts me in mind of U2's maxim, to take

the work seriously but not one's self. Armitage has a true gift for observation, an eye for nature a city person like myself can only dream of. The few poems in the book are tender and moving and certainly make me want to read more of his work. From the depth of the poems, though, he manages to lighten things up with self-deprecating descriptions of his moods as he goes on what seems to be a rather arduous adventure. (Although I didn't understand such nasty weather in July. How can that be?) Unlike other commentators I found the end to be perfect--honest and human. Indeed, the entire enterprise - a person walking in rain and cold and through all manner of obstacles and kindnesses to get home - is the human story, and Mr Armitage is a delightful protagonist/companion.

Interesting travelogue of the Peninne Way - beginning in Scotland and continuing across the border to England. Very poetical - not surprising since the author is a poet - and very lyrical. Interspersed with poems by the author, the landscape and weather conditions become real and vivid. I enjoyed it because it brought to life a complete slice of the United Kingdom that I had never known, seen or heard of - even though I spent years in London!!!!

If you, as I am, are a sucker for English countryside and a smart, funny traveling companion, read this book. The countryside covered is territory not often described in works seen in the States, and Armitage describes it lovingly and vividly. His portrayals of the various people he encounters are always enjoyable and at times hilarious. His most appreciable character analysis, though, appears in the honest, self-aware portrait he paints of himself. He apparently makes for an excellent companion in life; he is certainly one in print.

A wonderful amusing tale of walking the Pennine Way. I'm not a fan of poetry, but didn't resent the few poems dotted through, but loved Armitage's descriptions of the sometimes bleak landscapes and the eccentric locals. I particularly liked that he struggled with long distance walking, although he still enjoys it, as I do.

Armitage's journey down the backbone of England, from the Scottish borders to his home town, is a disarming ramble with frequent stops in pleasant places. I loved his descriptions of familiar places in the north of England, and his flinty descriptions of the characters and sights along the way.

Whether intended or not, the journey is the metaphor for the life of the poet himself, and stands as a series of reflections on self and society, home and away. Beautifully open and unflinching in the

face of obstacles expected and unexpected, though not always overcome.

The reader is taken for a delightful walk through a lesser known part of the English countryside with an unusual companion...a poet earning his bed and board by giving poetry readings at village pubs, libraries and unusual stops along the way. A relaxing read.

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