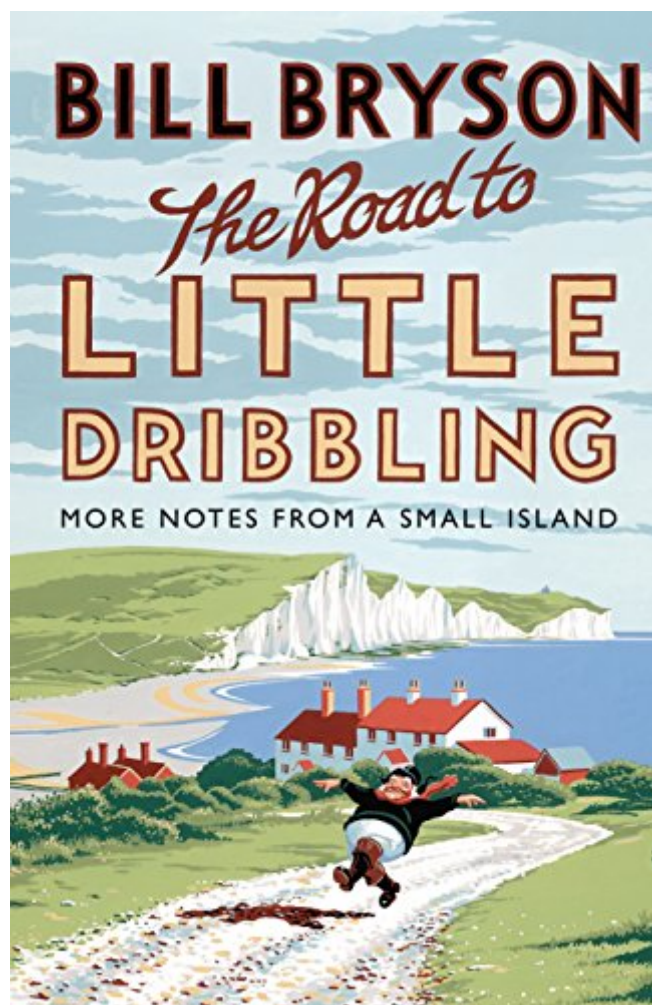


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The Road To Little Dribbling: More Notes From A Small Island (Bryson)



Synopsis

Twenty years ago, Bill Bryson went on a trip around Britain to celebrate the green and kindly island that had become his adopted country. The hilarious book that resulted, *Notes from a Small Island*, was taken to the nation's heart and became the bestselling travel book ever, and was also voted in a BBC poll the book that best represents Britain. Now, to mark the twentieth anniversary of that modern classic, Bryson makes a brand-new journey round Britain to see what has changed. Following (but not too closely) a route he dubs the Bryson Line, from Bognor Regis to Cape Wrath, by way of places that many people never get to at all, Bryson sets out to rediscover the wondrously beautiful, magnificently eccentric, endearingly unique country that he thought he knew but doesn't altogether recognize any more. Yet, despite Britain's occasional failings and more or less eternal bewilderments, Bill Bryson is still pleased to call our rainy island home. And not just because of the cream teas, a noble history, and an extra day off at Christmas. Once again, with his matchless homing instinct for the funniest and quirkiest, his unerring eye for the idiotic, the endearing, the ridiculous and the scandalous, Bryson gives us an acute and perceptive insight into all that is best and worst about Britain today.

Book Information

File Size: 2627 KB

Print Length: 397 pages

Publisher: Transworld Digital (October 8, 2015)

Publication Date: October 8, 2015

Language: English

ASIN: B00WZD5L9K

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #22,839 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #4 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Travel > Europe > Great Britain > England #6 in Books > Travel > Europe > England > General #16 in Books > Travel > Europe > Great Britain > General

Customer Reviews

Travel literature is the genre that made Bill Bryson famous. From his debut, *The Lost Continent*

(1989), to *Down Under* (2000), the cerebral yet comedic author from Des Moines, Iowa helped resuscitate the travel narrative and take it mainstream. However, after the millennial publication of his romp around Australia, Bryson diversified, penning books about science (*A Short History of Nearly Everything*), his youth (*The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid*), the Bard of Avon (Shakespeare), and everything from the spice trade (*At Home*) to baseball (*One Summer*). My first Bryson read was *A Walk in the Woods*, giddily passed around my workplace, and hurriedly followed by the prequel to *The Road to Little Dribbling: Notes from a Small Island* – “the book that made Bill a celebrity in Britain and supposedly outsold more than any other travelogue. Subsequently, I was hooked and devoured most of Bryson’s other efforts. Some of those efforts (e.g. Shakespeare) are outstanding, but it was the travel narratives that left the deepest impression. Bill Bryson introduced me to travel literature, meaning that prior to *A Walk in the Woods*, I didn’t know the category existed. In an interview, Bryson intimated he liked Paul Theroux (whose *Kingdom by the Sea* may have inspired *Notes from a Small Island*) and Redmond O’Hanlon, so I read their books and the authors they liked and discovered a rich genre populated by talented and erudite writers. Bill Bryson also introduced me to a unique style: fluid yet humorous, informative yet entertaining, charmingly complimentary yet devastatingly critical. Once a fan who eagerly anticipated Bill’s newest release, I eventually discovered other wordsmiths and gave his last two efforts a miss.

Twenty years ago (yes, really!), Bill Bryson wrote the brilliant “*Notes from a Small Island*” about his travels around Great Britain. This is a sequel, of sorts, with Bryson again travelling around Britain and making observations. He explains in Chapter 1 that his plan was to travel between the two points that were the furthest apart when separated by a straight line: Bognor Regis in the South and Cape Wrath in northernmost Scotland. Rather than follow the line religiously, he determined to use it as a rough guidance whilst visiting as many new places as he possibly could. This is rubbish. In fact, Bryson veers all over the south of Britain, going as far west as Cornwall and Wales and as far east as Norfolk and East Anglia, and showing remarkably little interest in venturing north. Two thirds of the way through the book and he’s only made it to Birmingham. Scotland gets a mere 12 pages of the total 381 (Wales gets 15). So really, he should have been honest about the fact that when he says Britain, what he really means is England. There is a map at the front of the book showing all sorts of places in Britain: it bears zero resemblance to the places that he actually visits. The other thing that emerges – and I suspect the real reason for the lower English focus – is that rather than being one long piece of travel, this is a group of day trips and overnight trips, which

are broken up by family events and trips to the US and various other commitments. If this was to be the approach, I wish Bryson had taken a bit more care in the planning. So often he turns up somewhere, realises it's Sunday and the museums are closed, and then gives up and leaves again.

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