

Pretty Good at Walking

A FAMILY JOURNEY • VINCE STRAWBRIDGE • A DISCUSSION GUIDE

A note for the leader

Nobody needs to know anything about hiking, you included.

It is 418 pages and it does not come divided. What it does have is mile markers for chapter headings, so a club can break anywhere: name a mile, and everybody knows where to stop.

Most clubs give a book forty to ninety minutes, and four questions will fill it. The four marked ♦ are a set that holds together. Use any of the rest, or ask each member to bring one of their own.

Question 1 needs the book only as far as MILE 50.7, which matters because some of the room will not have finished. Questions 2 and 10 give away how the book ends; 3, 4, 8 and 9 need a reader nearly through. Nobody has to have liked it, and you can say so before you start.

The people in this book are the author's wife and four children, eleven to sixteen when they set out, adults now.

Before people leave, read the last two things Aiden says at the border. *"I think I've learned I'm pretty good at walking."* And then: *"We did it, Dad,"* she said. *"Now, let's go home."*

Before you invite people

A leader should know what is in it before anyone accepts an invitation — not after somebody has started reading a passage to the room.

A murder-suicide MILE 714 — Vince tells it to one of his own daughters as they sit on the trail: a story from home, about a house her grandfather built. Nothing happens on the trail.

Infidelity, offered comfort MILE 1612 — a man's wife has been *"running around town with other men,"* and the comfort he gets is *"Surely the Lord must love you, to give you such a chance to share in this suffering."* Told not witnessed.

Naked adults, three times. At MILE 687.7 a swimmer crosses the rocks at dawn. At MILE 891 a hiker describes chasing deer off his pack with nothing on — *"Bare everything."* And at MILE 2330.7 (2340.9 in the 2024 printing) the trail passes above a hot spring. The rocks on the way in carry crude graffiti, including one drawing their father has to explain; at the spring he points out a naked man to Georgie, and Henry, who looks, says *"I wish I hadn't looked."*

Donner Pass jokes MILE 1488 — Henry works out that his father has the most meat to go around, if they get trapped.

The language includes “jackass” at MILE 860.5, and “damn” and “hell” about a dozen times in all.

The questions

The book’s chapters are mile markers, so each question has the mile where its scene can be found.

An underlined mile number opens that mile on the map, where the line from the book sits — with the family’s own photograph or footage from that stretch when there is one. It is the mile, not always the exact beat the question asks about. Six of the miles below — 14.6, 505.4, 1822.6, 2215, 2282.3 and 2330.7 — are not on the map at all, so they are plain.

This guide follows the 2026 edition.

1 • Cry-thirty

–18 • 50.7

Georgie is crying on a climb and asks her father the time. He tells her it is cry-thirty. “*That’s not funny,*” she says — and then, before the chapter is out, she laughs at it MILE –18. By MILE 50.7 he has turned the word on himself. Is it a kindness or a dodge? Go round the room.

◆ 2 • The children’s chapters

148.6 • 2330.7

At MILE 148.6, and again at MILE 2330.7, the narration is handed over to the children and to Monica under their own names. Take one of those passages: what does it tell you that the father’s account of the same stretch does not, and does it back him up or correct him?

3 • Whose Monica?

148.6 • 2330.7 • 2307 • 14.6

The thru-hike was Monica's, wanted since high school; taking the children was his idea. She speaks in her own name inside the children's chapters MILES 148.6, 2330.7 and gives her verdict to a friend at MILE 2307. Set those against the Monica of MILE 14.6, where he tells a stranger how they came to be out there and she keeps correcting him. Who is the Monica of this book — hers or his?

◆ 4 • “I’ve seen better”

6.3 • 1801 • 2282.3

At MILE 6.3 the father asks Henry whether he has ever seen such a view. “*I’ve seen better*,” Henry says. He says it again in the Muir hut at MILE 1801 — the first thing out of him after the cold had him sitting rigid and not answering. The family laughs. June reports a third one at MILE 2282.3. Is it the same joke every time? What is the laughter doing there?

◆ 5 • Monica’s condition

833.3

At the end of an argument about obedience, Monica sets one condition: “*As long as they know that you know that you don’t know everything*” MILE 833.3. Does the rest of the book honor her condition?

6 • Three times close to going home

1900

At MILE 1900 he tells a stranger they have three times come “*this close*” to going home — not the bad-day kind, the nearest-airport kind — and names one. Which three would you count? Bring the miles. He is speaking with seven hundred and fifty-two miles still to go, so his count stops there. Does yours?

7 • Going broke

1130

At MILE 1130 the book turns the family’s ruin into a claim: going broke may have been the best gift they received. Then it asks whether the father can take any credit. His evidence is two refusals: “*Can I have an iPad?*” “*We can’t afford it.*” Does the claim earn its keep?

8 • What the book is for

505.4

At MILE 505.4, at his cousin's dining table, the book states the job it means to do. Read that page, then the acknowledgments. Is the book you have just read that book, or did it turn into something addressed to strangers? Whose remembering does it serve now that it has been published?

9 • The arrival you'd give up

1514 • 2215

Georgie tells a stranger she would rather know what is coming than be surprised by it MILE 1514. At MILE 2215 Monica asks him to tell her what he is arranging, so she can decide what she can do. The surprises keep coming anyway. If the family had been let in, what would the stretch after Mile 2215 have lost? Name the arrival you would have given up.

◆ 10 • The borrowed title

2188 • 1822.6 • 2652.2

The title is a phrase he picks up at MILE 2188 from Airborne, a hiker the family first met at MILE 1822.6. The last person to say it is Aiden, at MILE 2652.2 — and then she says one more thing, and then the book's last pages are hers as well: *"Rather than an epilogue..."*, a day on trail in her own words. What does the book gain by ending on her and not on him?

To read aloud, not to ask

Three recommended passages.

The chapter written in the second person to June MILE 603.3 — read it and ask nothing after.

The opening MILE -31.1 — the drive to the trailhead. It will take a cold group into the book; start at the top and stop where you like.

Where the trail passes a detainment center MILE 2645 — worth reading and worth leaving there. If a group wants a prompt, hold it to what Georgie does. She waves. The boy waves back.

When the room stalls

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1. What in that chapter makes you say that?
 2. Can you say more?
 3. Which mile are you looking at?
 4. Who reads it differently?
 5. If that holds at Mile 603.3, what about Mile 1634?
 6. Has anyone changed their mind?
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Questions readers ask

These are not ours. A reader sent them — the things people ask him once they have finished it. They are a good way to end a night, and they are the brief if you are interviewing him. There are no prepared answers here, and there will not be: these are his to answer.

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1. Do you still talk about it?
 2. How did it change you?
 3. What would you do differently?
 4. How are the kids, years later?
 5. How did you let them walk out of sight?
 6. Were you ever afraid for their safety?
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Have Vince join the end of your meeting

He will sit in with clubs that have read it. Free.

Your group discusses the book on its own. He comes in for the last part of the meeting. The people in this book are his wife and his four children. A room with the author in it from the start tends to go easy.

Free. No charge, nothing to buy, no minimum number of copies, and nothing asked in return — not a review, not a post, not a mention.

Thirty to forty-five minutes, at the end of your meeting, after you have talked on your own.

By video — or in person if your group is near Lakeland, Florida.

Four clubs a month, and only a few dates in each month.

About a month's notice. If your group picks its books in the spring for the autumn, ask in the spring; the date can be held.

He reconfirms the day before. Give two names he can reach, so a dead phone doesn't cost your group its evening.

Any size — five to ten, ten to twenty, twenty to thirty-five, or more than that. Say which, so he knows what he is walking into.

No fees, in either direction. He does not charge clubs, and he does not pay to appear. Anything that asks an author for a "spotlight fee" is not a book club.

HOW TO ASK

Email strawbridgetreks@gmail.com with the subject "*Book-club visit*".

Some webmail drops a long prefilled message, so here is the same thing as plain text. Copy it into your own email if the button comes up empty — or just write a paragraph. None of it is required.

Your name:

Your club or group:

Roughly how many people (5-10, 10-20, 20-35, or 35 and up):

Two or three dates that could work:

Your time zone:

Video, or in person (we are near Lakeland, Florida):

Anything your group especially wants to get to:

How you came across the book:

That last line is the only measurement there is. These pages carry no tracking of any kind, so how a club found the book is something a person has to say, or nobody knows it. A reply isn't guaranteed, and writing about a visit doesn't subscribe you to anything.

Write to Vince

Something in the book stayed with you? Send Vince a note, or ask him about the book, family trips, or faith. A reply isn't guaranteed, and emailing Vince doesn't subscribe you to the newsletter.

strawbridgetreks@gmail.com

Asking him to sit in with your club is a different note, and the terms are just above: have Vince join the end of your meeting.

Pretty Good at Walking: A family journey

Kindle Paperback Audiobook

The revised edition was published October 5, 2026. The quotations on this page follow it; a 2024 paperback reads a little differently in places.

Clubs that want to end the night with video: the family filmed the 2018 walk as they went, and it has its own playlist — 100 videos of this book's hike. The whole archive is at youtube.com/@strawbridgetreks.

The audiobook links on this page are Audible referral links. Using them costs you nothing extra.

Pretty Good at Walking: A family journey · Vince Strawbridge · revised edition, 2026

This guide: revised October 8, 2026 · prettygoodatwalking.com/bookclub

The one-page version to hand to your group: prettygoodatwalking.com/nominate