

A Short Hike  
James Moller  
Klutch Kitten Gaming Podcast  
03/20/20

### **Introduction:**

[upbeat intro music]

Hello and welcome everyone! This is James Moller, also known as Klutch Kitten, and I'm so glad that you're here for Episode 72 of the show!

I know I say that I'm glad you're here every single week, but trust me, there is no episode where it's more true! You could be binging Animal Crossing and ignoring everything else right now, but you've chosen to hang out for 20 minutes and for that I'm grateful!

Before we get into this week's game, I want to remind you of two quick things:

First off, earlier this week I released a roundtable episode with my good friend Johnny Bland. It should be chilling out in your podcast feeds, so make sure to give it a listen when you have a chance!

Second, like I mentioned last week, a name change is in the near future! I'm in the process of nailing down details, and I can't wait to share more! If you want to keep up how things are progressing, give me a follow at klutchkittengaming on Instagram where I'll be posting more of the play by play.

Let's move on now to this week's game!

[transition music]

### **Game Facts:**

Today we're going to be looking at A Short Hike, which is a small exploration game developed by Adam Robinson-Yu! What started out as Adam's personal art project in 2018 eventually made its way to becoming a full-fledged title on April 5th of 2019. Apart from A Short Hike, Adam helped develop a co-op adventure game called Pitfall Planet and is currently working on Paper RPG.

A Short Hike costs \$7.99, and as its name implies, it's a brief experience clocking in at around one and a half hours.

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We'll get more into controls in a bit, but I found that mouse and keyboard worked best for playing the game.

Let's transition now to the narrative!

[transition music]

**Narrative:**

[begin quiet music...]

Claire: Mom, how long am I going to be at Hawk Peak?

Claire's Mom: (inaudible)

Claire: Oh. Well, I'll be able to call you, right?

Claire's Mom: (inaudible)

Claire: Okay, well I can't wait for your call tomorrow! I miss you already mom.

[...end quiet music]

A Short Hike starts out with a young bird named Claire being dropped off to stay with her Aunt May. Unfortunately, right off the bat Claire is faced with a problem: one that I'm sure you're familiar with as well. She wakes up to find out that her cell phone has no reception! After telling Aunt May about the issue, Claire is told she'll be able to get reception at the top of the park. That's where your short hike begins.

What's interesting is that I started playing this game with the expectation of it being straightforward and linear, both narratively and gameplay-wise. I mean, the issue of cell-phone service is relatable, but it's not exactly a life or death problem that pulls you into a plot line!

It turns out that my gamer instinct was incorrect though because A Short Hike has a lot more to offer than meets the eye. Maybe you're familiar with the Emerson Quote, "Life is a Journey, not a destination." Although this game begins with the mountain peak as your destination, the charm of the world Adam created is displayed throughout the journey.

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After you leave your Aunt, you begin to meet people around the island: a girl searching for shells on the beach, a runner looking for their headband, a pair of friends developing a new form of volleyball. What starts out as a very focused story slowly expands to include a whole community of people at Hawk Peak.

Many of those individuals have small tasks for you to complete for a reward, but some of them just want to be your friend. One example of this is when I found a mysterious note tied to a tree. It mentioned something about a competition, and when I came back later, there was a character who wanted to race me to some buildings in the distance.

Again, my gamer brain immediately thought, "oooh, I'll get another reward to progress in the game!", but what's funny is that after I beat him on my ninth or tenth try, what he gave me had nothing to do with progression. The only thing I received was a walkie-talkie that let me call him in to race again. He just wanted to hang out!

This game has been described as an Animal Crossing and Breath of the Wild mash-up, and I can totally see why. Most of the character interactions aren't mind-blowing conversations, but what's amazing is that they all feel genuine.

You end up meeting so many different characters that the primary goal of getting cell phone-service is easy to forget. Honestly, if the game ended with Claire going to sleep in her cabin after a long day of just hanging out, I would have been happy with the narrative. It didn't stop there though.

I won't spoil the game's conclusion, but what I will say is that it's surprisingly touching. It strikes notes of peace, sadness, joy, love, and a whole swath of other emotions which end the game perfectly.

Let's shift our focus now to the gameplay.

[transition music]

### **Gameplay:**

You might be wondering: If character interactions give an Animal Crossing vibe, which part of this game harkens back to the masterpiece of Breath of the Wild?

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One of the biggest praises of Breath of the Wild was the sense of discovery and freedom. If you saw something in the distance, you could go and discover it for yourself! A Short Hike feels the same way on a scaled-down map.

When you leave Aunt May's cabin, you can go whichever direction you want! There are some movement limitations early on, but for the most part, your progression isn't on rails. Instead of trying to take down Calamity Gannon, you have the goal of reaching the top of the mountain. The way by which you make that happen, and the amount of detours you take, is entirely up to you!

If it's not already crystal clear, this core design feels wonderful. It makes the world seem more vast, and in a similar way to Breath of the Wild, I kept having those moments where I'd see a structure or item off in the distance, and I'd have nothing stopping me from going to explore!

In terms of actual mechanics, what's there is primarily focused on traversal. You're able to climb and fly, and as you collect more golden feathers, you can climb higher and fly for longer.

Apart from traversal mechanics, there are also a wide variety of items you can pick up and use for mini-games including a shovel, compass, stick, fishing pole and so-on. What's brilliant about these items is that it's not always clear what they're for. I kept finding and picking up sticks, but it wasn't until later on that I realized what I could actually do with them!

None of the mini-games are anything to fawn over, but their place in the experience is crucial. They reinforce the journey vs. destination focus by fleshing out the world with activities, and in the case of the shovel in particular, since it allows you to dig for treasure, it encourages you to explore the entire map.

Before we round out our review by discussing the art and sound design, let's touch on a couple downsides of the gameplay. I don't typically mention technical frustrations, but when they impact enjoyment of the game, they're worth mentioning.

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First off, the controls for A Short Hike are wack. Flying in particular is unintuitive. In order to maintain a glide, you have to hold a directional key, and if you want to dive, you need to let go of your directional keys. It was so confusing since I expected gliding to be the normal state of motion. Also, this frustration was only further emphasized by my second complaint: the game's camera.

When a camera is operating as expected, it shouldn't be noticeable. Unfortunately, I noticed camera issues on multiple occasions. The game takes a mostly fixed, isometric perspective, which is great until you run into a couple specific circumstances.

First off, when you climb up a mountain, you do so by pressing and holding jump and then pressing your up key...well, at least until the camera shifts angles halfway up the mountain. The camera is trying to give you a better view of what's at the top, but the issue is that if you continue to hold the up key, the game will think you want to jump off and glide away. What you instead have to do is hold the up key until the camera angle changes, and at that point, you need to press the down key to continue sticking to the mountain. It is frustrating as hell.

The second camera issue comes into play when you're trying to reach small, elevated locations. At one point I was trying to fly to the top of a tower, but it took around 12 tries because I had to start my jump from a screen away, and by the time my destination was in view, I struggled to read my height due to the unusual perspective.

Without belaboring these points, there are some clear technical issues that should be fixed. Thankfully everything else about the game is incredible, otherwise these issues could have been the nail in the coffin.

[transition music]

### **Art & Sound Design:**

Now that we've discussed the narrative and gameplay, let's talk about the art and sound design.

On the art side, this game is gorgeous. Adam uses a pixel-art style in an isometric perspective, which ends up creating a truly unique look. The colors are painterly and welcoming, and

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the way details are portrayed shows a great deal of skill. Each new area I went to felt screenshot worthy, and the end of the game specifically was breathtaking.

When it comes to the soundtrack, this is the one area where Adam didn't take the lead. The score was composed by Mark Sparling and is an incredible accompaniment to the art. It reminds me a lot of the Stardew Valley soundtrack, and the way it changes as you go from location to location is lovely. It helps you get lost in whatever moment you're in and only further connects you to the island and its inhabitants.

It's clear that Mark was on board with the vision of A Short Hike because his songs lent well to the carefree and joyful air of the game.

[transition music]

### **Summary:**

Now that we've talked about the narrative, gameplay, art and sound design, let's summarize with some positives and negatives:

First off on the positive side, the narrative is both beautifully simplistic and surprisingly deep. The way Adam created authentic characters with such little dialogue and development is truly impressive.

Second, the sense of freedom in exploration infuses traversal with excitement, and the lack of structure nullifies any sense of being rushed.

Third, the art and soundtrack are lovely additions to the game that only enhance the other positives.

First off on the negative side, controls are unintuitive and clunky.

Second, at times, the camera felt like it was working against me rather than for me.

[transition music]

### **Verdict:**

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We've made it now to the final boss! This is the part of the podcast where I let you know whether you should slay the game and buy it, flee the game and avoid it, or farm up and wait for a sale. My verdict for A Short Hike is to slay this game.

I truly believe this is a diamond in the rough, and although it's not without its faults, I think you're missing out if you choose to pass it up. Whether you're looking for a short game to experience with a significant other or something to play while you cool off between rounds of Warzone, A Short Hike is the perfect game to grab.

[transition music]

### **Conclusion:**

As always, thank you so much for taking the time to listen in!

If you haven't already, I'd love it if you gave the show a five star review on Apple Podcasts, and if you want to go a step further, let a real-life friend know about what I do! In addition, I'd also love it if you reached out and said "Hi"! You can find me on Instagram and Facebook @klutchkittengaming, on Twitter @kkgpodcast, and via email at [klutchkittengaming@gmail.com](mailto:klutchkittengaming@gmail.com).

I hope you have a lovely rest of the day, and I'll see you in game!

[upbeat outro music]