

LEAVE NO TRACE

USA (2018) 104 minutes

Director: Debra Granik

Cast: Ben Foster (Will)

Thomasin Harcourt McKenzie (Tom)

Jeff Kober (Mr Walters)

Dale Dickey (Dale)



Screening 4 September 2019 at Swindon Arts Centre

Synopsis

Based on Peter Rock's novel *My Abandonment*, **Leave No Trace** revolves around a teenage girl (Thomasin Harcourt McKenzie) and her father (Ben Foster) who have lived undetected for years in Forest Park, a vast wood on the edge of Portland, Oregon. A chance encounter leads to their discovery and removal from the park and into the charge of a social service agency. They try to adapt to their new surroundings until a sudden decision sets them on a perilous journey into the wilderness seeking independence, and forces them to confront their conflicting desire to be part of a community or a fierce need to live apart.

Reviews



A tale of a father and daughter living off-grid in the forests of the Pacific north-west of the US proves the perfect material for **Winter's Bone** director Debra Granik. Renowned for her empathetic portrayal of marginalised outsiders, Granik here conjures a low-key drama that is alternately gripping and melancholic, but always shot through with an unmistakable ring of truth.

We open in verdant nature, in the secretive midst of a vast public park on the outskirts of Portland, Oregon. Here, reclusive veteran Will and his teenage daughter live in camouflaged encampments, moving regularly to evade detection. Their existence is elemental; they make fire from the earth and gather water from the sky. When their cover is blown, the pair are captured, interrogated, and forced to re-enter the modern world, with divisive results.

The result is a work of overwhelming, understated power that quite simply took my breath away.

Mark Kermode, The Guardian

Director Debra Granik launched the career of Jennifer Lawrence with her brilliant backwoods thriller **Winter's Bone** (2010), and this superb film about a father and daughter living off the grid should, by rights, do the same for its young star, Thomasin Harcourt McKenzie.

She plays an adolescent girl named Tom who has been living with her army veteran father (Ben Foster) in a secret camp in the midst of a national park near Portland, Oregon. The pair's relationship is strong and loving but, after their refuge is discovered and the authorities get involved in their lives, the differences between them slowly emerge.

Based on Peter Rock's 2009 novel *My Abandonment*, itself inspired by a true story, **Leave No Trace** is deeply compelling yet entirely unshowy. Foster quietly reveals his haunted character's state of mind (it's clear he has PTSD), while McKenzie conveys Tom's teenage yearning for the social interaction he shuns. Understated sound design – from a helicopter drone to the hum of bees – subtly amplifies the film's themes of trauma and trust, independence and belonging.

Jason Best, Movie Talk

Film Facts

- **Leave No Trace** was filmed in the forested areas of Oregon, including Forest Park near Portland, over the course of 30 days.
- The film holds an approval rating of 100% on review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes.
- In the USA 'Leave No Trace' is a set of outdoor ethical principles promoting conservation in wilderness areas.

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