



Photo: Nick Tomecek using a timer.

Hostels, showers, fruits, vegetables, and beer made towns a welcome relief from the rugged mountains. Getting to a town required frequent hitchhiking when the trail did not directly pass through the location. Though awkward at first, our confidence level grew after the third or fourth hitch. A fellow thru-hiker with experience hitching across America taught us the techniques for scoring a ride. His trail name was "Chafe," for one of his physical trail ailments and abrasive personality. Of the lessons learned, he mentioned to never hitch at night, make eye contact, smile, and allow enough runway for the driver to size you up. His methods worked most of the time, though we found that taking off our packs and limping made people feel sorry for us, helping us find a ride much faster. Hitchhiking is commonplace in towns around the AT. The residents of the towns were accustomed to seeing scruffy hikers on the roadside yearning for a ride and would offer one most of the time. Those that did not pull over probably wanted to keep the overpowering odor of hikers out of their brand new SUVs, not because they thought we were dangerous.

Vince and Nick Tomecek sit on McAfee Knob in northern Virginia for a break and a look at the view below them.