

The highest I've been in

It was the highest I'd ever been in South Carolina. My eyes were glossy; my mouth was pasty. I even felt a little choked up.

After all those years living in the Lowcountry looking out on flat terrain, it was hard to believe I hadn't crossed the state line as I stood atop Sassafras Mountain.

But there it was, a nearly 360-degree view that stretched out as far as the eyes could see. I have to admit I felt underserving. After all, we'd driven practically all the way to the top of the mountain.

I'm used to working

harder for my views. At least a few miles of hiking through the woods to reach the prize.



COMMON GROUND

STEPHANIE JADRNICKEK

But before me laid the rolling foothills of the Blue Ridge in exchange for a mere few hundred-foot walk. Rather than gravitating to the overlook, my daughter and I were enticed by a gravel

road that curved up to a plateau. I soon realized we were on the Foothills Trail, a 76-mile trail connecting Table Rock to Oconee State Park.

We were standing on the peak of the mountain where the trail winds its way up over Sassafras. And though solitude comes to mind in a place so remote — believe it or not, we were not alone.

A couple sat on a log, holding hands as they gazed out at the autumn colors creeping down the next ridge. A family headed back down the hill, their little ones running ahead of the pack. And three men in the

center of it all sparked my curiosity.

It took me a few minutes to figure out the characters and setting, but I soon realized they weren't on a day trip to the mountains — this was only a pit stop to fuel up before hiking on to a further destination.

It was a father with his two teenage sons and an old hound dog. They'd set up a propane burner and were cooking up lunch. Lunch with the best view in the state, I might add.

For a few moments I envied them. Nothing to worry about except the day's journey. Sure, they'd have to sleep outside that night, but they'd wake up

South Carolina

to birds chirping and the fresh cool mountain air on their cheeks.

No checking the cell-phone every 10 minutes for calls, texts, emails or tweets. No surfing the web or wasting precious time on Facebook. Only a daily destination, placing one foot in front of the other and staying immersed in the present moment.

When I was a teenager, I loved nothing more than setting out from a new trailhead along Skyline Drive in the Shenandoah Valley. Hiking wasn't a form of exercise for the body; it was an act of joy for the spirit.

But as I've grown older

my responsibilities have whittled away at my spare time, leaving me a little bit of leftover to use as efficiently as possible.

So as I stood on top of Sassafras, I vowed to myself to hike the Foothills Trail — maybe not now or even next year, but someday. Because what's life without aspirations?

And until then, I'll satiate my desire with day trips on the weekends, since there's nothing quite like a South Carolina high.

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