

# Meet the Man Who Just Destroyed The Appalachian Trail Speed Record

The 26-year-old Seattle native describes the highs and lows of his journey, including the final 37-hour, 110.8-mile push to the top of Mount Katahdin.

By [Jenny McCoy](#) Wednesday, September 6, 2017, 11:24 am



Joe McConaughy reaches the end of his epic Appalachian Trail run. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF JOE MCCONAUGHY

This indefatigable drive for "more" explains how McConaughy, known on the trail as "Stringbean," averaged 48 miles a day for six and a half weeks straight to finish the 2,189-mile AT in the fastest known time ever recorded: 45 days, 12 hours and 15 minutes. He tracked his effort via GPS, sharing regular updates on Instagram (@thestring.bean), and his time has been verified by the Fastest Known Time board member Peter Bakwin. (There is no official sanctioning body for AT records.)

What's more, McConaughy completed the challenge self-supported, meaning he had no sponsors, crew or organized support and instead relied on hiker

towns and road crossings to resupply food and water. Each day, he lugged a 25-pound backpack containing his clothes, sleeping bag, tent, medical supplies and a three-to-four day ration of food and water.

He persevered through rain, hail, darkness and a throbbing ache in his left knee by keeping close tabs on his nutrition and hydration levels and hyping himself up as needed. "I'd tell myself, 'This may suck now, but you gotta get through it and there's always a light at the end of the tunnel.'"

That light came in the form of Katie Kiracofe, McConaughy's girlfriend, and Josh Katzman, his friend, who hiked up 5,291-foot Katahdin to greet him at the summit. They welcomed an emotional, rain-soaked McConaughy with hugs, an emergency blanket and warm, dry clothes.

The trio hiked down the mountain and set up camp for the night, where McConaughy says he ate "like nine s'mores" for dinner. The next morning, they drove to Boston and McConaughy enjoyed his first "real meal" at The Deluxe Station Diner.

He ordered the "The Hungry Person" special, a greasy, colossal spread of pancakes, eggs, sausage, home fries and toast. He also ate half of Kiracofe's breakfast.

### **Easy days were few and far between**

McConaughy, who set the supported speed record for the 2,660-mile Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) in 2014, began seriously contemplating the AT self-supported challenge about ten months ago. "After doing the PCT, I thought 'What's next?'" he says. "The AT seemed like a natural next step and it slowly grew as a seed in my mind."

He trained for the task with several ultramarathons this spring, including the back-to-back Gorge Waterfalls 100K and the Lake Sonoma 50. (His friends made a documentary about the experiences and are now working on another film about his AT feat). He also spent a couple weeks in Canada's Banff's National Park, logging miles and miles on the mountainous terrain—although in retrospect, nothing could truly prepare him for the intensity of the AT, which traverses 14 states and includes more than 500,000 feet of elevation change. It's a humid, buggy, rocky and densely wooded trek, and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (the entity that maintains the trail) recommends hikers allot five to seven *months* to complete it end to end. *Tackle the trail with these rugged new kicks.*