

Newfound Gap to The Jump Off & Charlies Bunion

Out & Back

Appalachian, Boulevard, and Jump Off Trails

Trail Map



Elevation Profile



Trailhead

Drive to the Newfound Gap parking area on US 441, either from Gatlinburg or Cherokee, then hike the Appalachian Trail northbound from the trail sign.

Waypoints

- 1) Junction, Sweet Heifer Creek Trail to the right to Kephart Shelter. Stay on A.T.
- 2) Junction, Boulevard Trail to the left, Take the Boulevard Trail. In approximately 0.1 mile the Jump Off Trail will turn to the right.
- 3) The Jump Off. Return from the Jump Off to the A.T. and turn left toward the Icewater Spring Shelter, then continue to Charlies Bunion.
- 4) Charlies Bunion.

Hike Description

The Appalachian Trail Northbound from Newfound Gap is heavily used, not only by A.T. hikers, but also as the approach trail to the *Jump-Off* as well as the *Boulevard Trail* to Mt. LeConte. There are also a fair number of park visitors who just want to say that they “hiked on the AT”.

The first point of interest you will encounter is *Sweet Heifer Creek Trail* junction. The origin of this somewhat interesting trail name goes back to the pre-National Park days when farmers who had settled these mountains drove their cattle and pigs up the mountains for cooler summer pasture. A “Heifer” is a young, virgin, cow. For these playful little ones, the climb along the stream and up to this gap was a strenuous undertaking producing much “Sweat”. Hence, the name.

In another mile you will reach the Junction with the *Boulevard Trail*. This trail leads 5.4 miles to Mt. LeConte. In my view it is the easiest and most visually rewarding route with far less traffic than you will encounter on either the *Alum Cave* or *Rainbow Falls* Trails. Turn left on the Boulevard Trail. In about 100 yards you will reach the spur trail that leads 0.8 mile to Mt. Kephart and the Jump-Off.

After visiting the Jump-Off, you will return to the Appalachian Trail as you came. Turn left and continue past the Icewater Springs Trail Shelter. Many Thru Hikers on the A.T. will actually shorten their day and stay at the Ice Water Springs Shelter, one of the most scenic shelter locations in the park, if not on the entire Appalachian Trail.

From Ice Water Springs continue on the A.T. to the massive rocky outcrop called *Charlie's Bunion*. At one time this modest peak on the west side of *Dry Sluice Gap* was covered with trees just as the surrounding trail ridge is today. But, in the mid-1920's fires swept through the area (almost certainly the result of clear-cut logging operations). In the heavy rains that followed (this is a Temperate Rain Forest), all of the soil on the peak was completely washed away leaving the bare, rocky outcropping that you see today.

Comments

This moderate Out & Back Hike of approximately 9 miles will expose you to two of the most dramatic views in the national park, the *Jump-Off* and *Charlies Bunion*. For an adventure you will not forget I suggest a hike under clear skies when the fall color is at its peak. A winter hike, with unencumbered views, is also an excellent option.

So, where does the name "Charlies Bunion" come from? In 1929 Horace Kephart, author and proponent for the National Park, along with photographer George Masa, were hiking the main ridge of the Smokies, possibly scouting out the future route of the Appalachian Trail. With them were a group of local hikers, including a fellow by the name of Charlie Conner. They stopped for a rest on the rocky top of Fodderstack, the original name of this peak. Charlie Conner took off his boots and socks revealing a bunion that got the attention of his companions because of its size and similarity to the surrounding rocks. Horace Kephart looked at Charlies toes and said, "Charlie, I'm going to get this place put on a government map for you." And he did...

Please permit me one final reference to the historical importance of this place. In early 1800's, long before the fires and erosion that created Charlies Bunion, a settler named William Whaley, who was moving here from South Carolina, climbed through Dry Sluice Gap and down to Porter Creek and the area known as Greenbrier today. Looking at the terrain today that would seem an impossibility. But back then Whaley, his family, their possessions and livestock made the journey. To better grasp his determination I encourage you to hike the 2.7 mile Porter Creek Trail from Greenbrier to Backcountry Campsite #31.