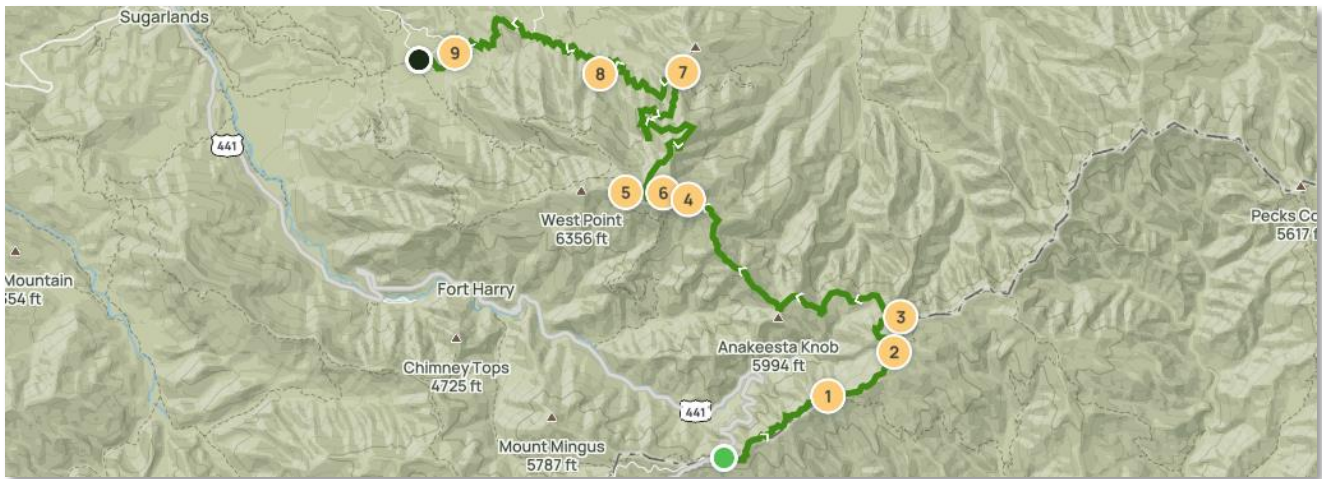


# Newfound Gap to Cherokee Orchard

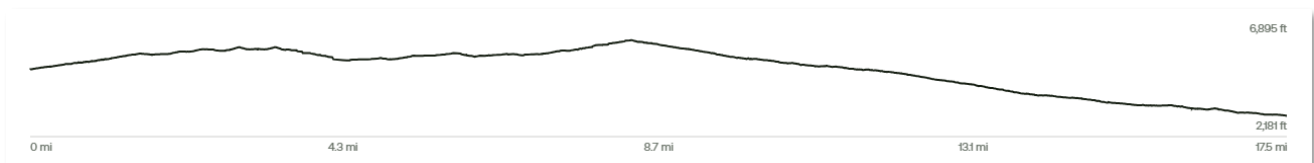
## Point-To-Point

### A.T., Jumpoff, Boulevard & Trillium Gap Trails

#### Trail Map



#### Elevation Profile



#### Trailhead

Newfound Gap on the border between Tennessee and North Carolina. The access trail is the north bound Appalachian Trail where it leaves Newfound Gap on the east side at the base of the Newfound Gap Overlook. There is a trail sign identifying the A.T.

#### Waypoints

- 1) Junction, Sweat Heifer Trail south to Kephart Prong.
- 2) Junction, The Boulevard Trail. Turn Left.
- 3) In 1/10 mile you will reach the junction of the Jumpoff Trail, an out & back trail to an incredible clifftop view open to Greenbrier Cove and beyond.
- 4) Myrtle Point, the east peak of Mount LeConte.
- 5) Cliff Top, the west peak of Mount LeConte.
- 6) Mount LeConte. The Mount LeConte Trail Shelter is just west of the peak, as is the Mount LeConte Lodge.
- 7) Junction, Brushy Mountain Trail. If the weather is clear the climb to Brushy Mountain is well worth the effort.
- 8) Gratto Falls.
- 9) Junction, Baskins Creek Trail.

#### Hike Description

I am presenting this as a two day hike with a night in the Mount LeConte Shelter. The total distance, including the side trails is 18.5 miles. The first day distance from Newfound Gap to the Mount LeConte Shelter is 8.9 miles, again with the Out & Back to the Jumpoff, approximately 0.8

miles. Also, the total hike distance does not include the spur trails to the various points of interest on Mount LeConte; Myrtle Point, Cliff Top, and Mount LeConte itself.

The hike begins at the Appalachian Trail sign near the base of the Newfound Gap Overlook. Note that there are two paths that leave the parking lot here. The one on the left is the A.T. while the one on the right goes to the restrooms. Note also that the initial part of this trail is heavily used, I suspect by park visitors who want to say they were on the Appalachian Trail.

In 1.7 miles you will come to the first trail junction, the Sweat Heifer Trail which leads down 3.7 miles to the Kephart Shelter and the Kephart Prong Trail, both named in honor of Horace Kephart<sup>1</sup>. One mile further on you will come to the second trail junction, The Boulevard Trail. Straight ahead the A.T. continues to the shelter at Ice Water Springs. Our hike will turn left on The Boulevard Trail that leads to Mount LeConte.

In a very short distance, you will come to the junction with the Jumpoff Trail on your right. I would encourage you to take this short Out & Back spur trail. On your way to the Jumpoff you will hike over the top of Mt. Kephart, 6,218'. From the Jumpoff, looking east you will see two other important points, Masa Knob<sup>2</sup> (5,688 feet) and Charlies Bunion (5,288 feet). To the north you will be looking into Greenbrier Cove and Porters Creek.

As you continue on the Boulevard Trail, especially on hot summer days, take comfort in the fact that the elevation at which you are hiking will never fall below 5,500'. For the first mile after you leave the Jumpoff Trail the grade will be downhill, and you will lose about 500' in elevation. After that, over the next 1.5 miles you will regain 400' before descending into Alum Gap. Then, over the next 2 miles you will climb to just below the crest of Mount LeConte before dropping down to the Mount LeConte Trail Shelter. Just before reaching the crest, you will come to a spur trail to Myrtle Point. The trail is well marked. It is an excellent place to view the sunrise. For now, you may want to put it on hold and return in the morning after you are settled in the shelter.

Just beyond the shelter the Cliff Top Trail junction turns to the left. From here, in 3/10 of a mile you find another wonderful view to the south and to the west. This is the place to be at sunset. It is also an incredible place to view the night sky. On your return from there the Cliff Top loop trail will take you past the LeConte Lodge.

## Day 2

The Boulevard Trail ends at the lodge at its junction with the Bull Head Trail (to the left) and the Trillium Gap Trail (to the right). This morning, we will follow the Trillium Gap Trail 3.6 miles down the north face of Mount LeConte to the junction with the Brushy Mountain Trail, at which point the Trillium Gap Trail turns to the left (west) and continues on to Cherokee Orchard. The Brushy Mountain Trail extends 5.5 miles to the right and ends at the Greenbrier Cove Road. Before you continue on to Cherokee Orchard on the Trillium Gap Trail, seriously consider the short hike (4/10 of a mile) to the top of Brushy Mountain, a heather bald with views that justify the climb.

From the Brushy Mountain Trail junction, it is about a 1.5 mile descent to Gratto Falls. This is one of the most popular falls in the National Park so expect some company. The most interesting feature of this waterfall is that the trail goes behind the falls, a very interesting feature when the flow is good. After you leave the Gratto Falls, it is a very short distance to a spur trail to the right that leads to the Gratto Falls parking area. Most of your recent trail companions will leave you.

In about 2.5 miles, you will come to the Baskins Creek Trail junction, a 2.7 mile hike that leads to the Grapeyard Ridge Trail and then to Greenbrier Cove.

Finally, 8.9 miles into your day (not counting the short Brushy Mountain Trail) you arrive at your destination, the Cherokee Orchard Parking lot.

## Comments

I have presented this as a two-day hike with a night in the Mount LeConte Trail Shelter. Not because it can't be hiked in a day; with the modest climbs and the extensive downhill, it certainly can. The focus to me is all of the incredible beauty that God has put before us to enjoy, study, and understand in this incredible hike. The wide range of tree species from high to low altitude, the geology, the topography, the opportunity to view both mountain sunrise and sunset with no artificial lights to distract from the wonder of it all. And, if the weather is good, the view of the night sky, again with no loss of detail brought about by artificial lights. When was the last time you saw the Milky Way, as God assembled it, in such an environment?

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Horace Kephart was an author and librarian. He was perhaps best known as the author of *Our Southern Highlanders*, and the classic outdoors guide, *Camping and Woodcraft*. If the history of these mountains, and in particular the Great Smoky Mountains National Park are of interest to you, I will encourage you to read both of these books. The link below will also give you further insight into Kephart and his contributions to the park.

<https://www.wcu.edu/library/digitalcollections/kephart/index.htm>

<sup>2</sup> George Masa was also instrumental in the preservation and formation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In addition, he was an important player in the development of the Appalachian Trail in the mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina. I offer the following link to an article in the Appalachian Mountain Club periodical for further information.

<https://www.outdoors.org/resources/amc-outdoors/history/george-masa-how-a-japanese-photographer-helped-preserve-the-smoky-mountains/>