

Mt. LeConte (via Alum Cave Trail)

Trail Features:	Panoramic Views, geological
Trail Location:	Newfound Gap Road
Roundtrip Length:	11.0 Miles
Total Elevation Gain:	2,763 Feet
Avg. Elev Gain:	502 Feet
Highest Elevation:	6,593 Feet
Trail Difficulty Rating:	16.53 (strenuous)



Trail Description:

If ever there was a classic hike in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Alum Cave Trail to Mt. LeConte would certainly qualify. Sure, there are hikes in the Smokies that are far longer, gain more elevation, or have steeper climbs, but the Alum Cave Trail is unmatched in its combination of interesting geological features, history, high adventure and stunning panoramic views.



To reach the 6,593-foot summit of Mount LeConte hikers will have to climb 2,763 feet, and hike 5.5 miles from the Alum Cave Trailhead.

The first section of the Alum Cave Trail, up to Arch Rock, travels over a fairly gentle grade. Hikers will follow Alum Cave Creek over the course of the first mile. Just before reaching Arch Rock, however, the trail begins following the Styx Branch. This section of trail is choked with rosebay rhododendron, which offers beautiful blooms during the early summer.

At just over 1.3 miles from the trailhead, hikers will reach Arch Rock, the first prominent landmark along the trail. The arch was formed by freezing and thawing, which eroded away the softer rock from underneath the harder rock. The trail actually goes under the arch and requires a climb of several steps etched into the stone before exiting at the top.

Beyond Arch Rock, the trail begins ascending towards Alum Cave. Anakeesta Ridge will dominate the views on your left throughout this stretch. At roughly two miles from the trailhead, hikers will reach the appropriately named Inspiration Point, a heath bald that offers commanding views of Little Duck Hawk Ridge to the west and Myrtle Point towards the northeast. The Eye of the Needle, a hole in the rock near the top of Little Duck Hawk Ridge, can also be seen from this vantage point.



At 2.2 miles, hikers will reach Alum Cave, which really isn't a cave, but is actually a concaved bluff, about 80 feet in height, and roughly 500 feet in length. During the warmer months of the year, water drips off from the ledges above. In the winter, these droplets turn into large icicles.



Alum Cave is rich in history. The Epsom Salts Manufacturing Company was established at Alum Cave in 1838. Until it was sold in 1854, the company mined epsom salt from the cave, which was used by mountain folk to dye homespun

clothing a reddish brown. During the Civil War, the Confederate Army mined saltpeter from the cave, which was used to manufacture gunpowder.

Just past Alum Cave is Gracie's Pulpit. This landmark is named after [Gracie McNichol](#), who, despite several physical challenges throughout her life, climbed Mount LeConte on 244 occasions, including her last on her 92nd birthday! At roughly 2.6 miles from the trailhead, this small rock outcropping also marks the halfway point to the LeConte Lodge.



Above Gracie's Pulpit, the trail continues by hugging the cliff face. Over the next two miles you'll pass over several narrow rock ledges, many with cable handrails. A few of these ledges pass areas where water seeps out of the rock walls, and requires some careful negotiation to get around - while continuing to grasp onto the cables.



At 6,593 feet, Mount LeConte is the third highest peak in the Smokies. However, measured from its immediate base to its highest point, Mt. LeConte can be considered the tallest mountain in the Eastern United States, rising 5,301 feet from its base near Gatlinburg.