

Chimney Tops Trail

Trail Features:	Panoramic views, Cascading stream
Trail Location:	Newfound Gap Road
Roundtrip Length:	3.3 Miles
Total Elevation Gain:	1,487 Feet
Avg. Elevation Gain / Mile:	783 Feet
Highest Elevation:	4,753 Feet
Trail Difficulty Rating:	6.77 (moderate)



Trail Description:

On October 6, 2017, Great Smoky Mountains National Park reopened the Chimney Tops Trail to a newly developed observation point. The trail was closed for almost a full year due to the November 2016 wildfire. As a result of that fire, the area around the pinnacles was completely destroyed, and is now considered unsafe. While the trail was closed, park crews constructed a new observation point, located roughly a quarter-mile below the actual summit, which provides views of Mount LeConte and the Chimney Tops pinnacles.

On November 23, 2016 two juveniles started a wildfire near the Chimney Tops summit. By November 28th, the fire grew to 500 acres. After several months of exceptional drought conditions, and winds gusts reaching more than 80 mph that afternoon, the fire literally exploded. Over the next several hours, it burned almost 18,000 acres, including 11,410 acres within Great Smoky Mountains National Park. From Chimney Tops, the fire raced north, passing around the edges of downtown Gatlinburg and reaching the outskirts of Pigeon Forge. Before it was brought under control, the fire killed 14 people, injured more than 176 people, and damaged or destroyed at least 2,460 structures at a cost of more than \$500 million.

Before the fire, the Chimney Tops Trail was one of the most popular hikes in the Smokies, and we assume it will continue to be a favorite destination for park visitors. The trail owes much of its popularity to its relatively short length, and its outstanding panoramic views from the summit area. Its length, less than two miles, however, makes for a very steep hike - so much so that many hikers don't even

reach the top. The first half of the trail is relatively tame. However, to reach the summit area, hikers have to climb more than 960 feet over the course of the last mile!



The first section of trail more or less follows the cascading waters of Road Prong Creek, and crosses several footbridges along the 0.9-mile route to Beech Flats. If you're hiking during the spring or early summer, look for rhododendron, mountain laurel and many other wildflowers blooming along the trailside during this time period. The trail junction at Beech Flats marks the approximate half-way point for this hike. From here the Road Prong Trail branches off to the left towards the Appalachian Trail at Indian Gap, roughly 2.4 miles away. The Road Prong Trail, which continues to follow the stream of the same name, is one of the oldest trails in the Smokies. In the 18th and 19th centuries, this ancient path was commonly known as the Indian Gap Trail.

To reach the Chimney Tops, you'll have to stay on the main path, which veers towards the right.

Now the fun begins - that is, if you enjoy hiking up steep terrain. From the junction, the trail takes a westerly course and climbs roughly 730 feet over the next two-thirds of a mile, before swinging northward to climb the ridge leading towards the summit. As this ridge narrows, hikers will begin to enjoy some decent views of the mountains towards the east.

As mentioned above, this hike officially ends roughly one-quarter of a mile below the pinnacles. The new observation point, however, provides outstanding views of Mount LeConte and the pinnacles. For the safety of all hikers, the park has blocked

all access beyond this point. It's possible this final section could reopen someday in the future.

Chimney Tops is one of the few mountains in the Smokies that has a bare rock summit. The Cherokee name for Chimney Tops is Duniskwalgunyi, or "forked antler," which refers to its resemblance to the antlers of a deer.



Novice hikers should also note that the Chimney Tops Trail is a very strenuous hike. Although it's rated as moderate, due to its relatively low mileage, it's actually much more difficult as a result of its extreme elevation gain.