

MOUNTAINS

WORD FROM THE SMOKIES

Alum Cave Trail, heart of the park



On any given day, and particularly on weekends, the trailhead parking area for Alum Cave Trail is among the most crowded in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. At peak times, cars spill out of the parking area and line up on the sides of US 441, the main road bisecting the park from north to south.

It seems plenty of people like the trail so much that they are willing to walk along the road a considerable distance simply to get to the start of their actual trail experience. The Alum Cave love is easily understood.

For one, it’s a popular starting point — and also a possible ending point — for a visit to the top of Mount Le Conte. Every year, thousands of hikers park one car at Newfound Gap and another at Alum Cave. They hike via the Boulevard Trail to LeConte Lodge near the top of the mountain, stay overnight, and hike down the shorter Alum Cave Trail the next day. Their car awaits for a drive to Gatlinburg and a highly anticipated meal.

Even without the fine experience of reaching the high shoulders of Mount Le Conte, the first half of the Alum Cave Trail is also a gem in its own right — a streamside trail with excellent views and a wide path conducive to group hiking. In many ways, it’s the heart of the Smokies experience.

Tim Line, the retired manager of LeConte Lodge, could be termed an Alum Cave regular. Over decades of work at the lodge, he hiked the trail some 1,400 times — in the heat of midsummer and the snows of January and every combination of conditions in between.

He knows the quirks of the mountain better than most.

“You have to be ready for any type of weather you might encounter,” said Line. “In summer, the trail is going to be pretty hot in the lower elevations. It does cool off, but then you might get in a thunderstorm before you get to the top of the mountain.”

The weather can change dramatically in the winter, too.

“It can be sunny in the parking lot, and then when you hit the north slope of



Alum Cave Trail ascends the rocky outcropping known as Peregrine Peak, where surroundings transition from a dense forest to a high-elevation heath bald. Although peregrine falcons were once listed as federally endangered due to the harmful effects of pesticides including DDT, populations have recovered in many places thanks to the protection of nesting sites and re-releasing programs. There are two known nesting sites in the Smokies including one at Alum Cave Bluffs that has been monitored since 1997. PROVIDED BY GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS ASSOCIATION

“You have to be ready for any type of weather you might encounter. In summer, the trail is going to be pretty hot in the lower elevations. It does cool off, but then you might get in a thunderstorm before you get to the top of the mountain.”

Tim Line
Retired manager of LeConte Lodge

the mountain, you might be in a snowstorm before you get to the top,” said Line. “If you don’t have the proper rain-gear with the temperature cooling off, you have to worry about hypothermia in all weather, not just the winter. You have to be prepared.”

Two footbridges offer hikers entrance to the trail from the parking area. In summer months, it’s almost immediately cooler as you move along Alum Cave Creek in the shade of beeches and other hardwoods and alongside masses of rhododendron, their growth accelerated by the Smokies’ wealth of precipitation.

There are several creek crossings on footlogs on the way to Arch Rock. (These are relatively safe, but watch your step — and those of the kids.)

Here a huge rock outcropping provides the chance for hikers to “thread” a tunnel-like hole. You’re helped along by stepping stones and a handrail, but the taller folks in your group will be leaning over to make it through. It’s a fun experience for flatlanders.

Another trail footbridge shows the way to Huggins Hell, a mass of mountainside growth and undergrowth so thick that old-timers long ago deemed it worthy of the “hell” nickname. Don’t

See TRAIL, Page 9A



After hiking the Appalachian Trail in 1976, Tim Line found a job in Great Smoky Mountains National Park working at LeConte Lodge. Line would ultimately stay on Mount Le Conte for nearly four decades. By his own count, he has completed the trek to LeConte Lodge along Alum Cave Trail about 1,400 times. PROVIDED BY DAVID BRILL

USA TODAY NETWORK

Dining Deals USA

AXK5RP8

BONUS CODE

1) Register and enter codes at: www.diningdealsusa.com

2) Enter today’s code before Monday, August 22 at 11:59 p.m.

3) Redeem today’s bonus code for coupon redemptions that interest you. Coupons cover restaurants, travel, family fun, automotive, shopping and more!

* Discounts vary by merchant, location and offer; subject to availability. Offers may change without notice. Total savings vary based on the number of discounts and coupons redeemed and value of offers.

TODAY’S BONUS CODE

Now Is Your Time To

Find Your Dream Job!

Scan or visit:

localiq.com/recruitment/job-seekers-search/

Plus, learn tips and tricks on how to start your job search journey, now.

LOCALiQ RECRUITMENT

Citizen Times

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Customer service

To view important information online related to your subscription, visit aboutyoursubscription.citizen-times.com. You can also manage your subscription at account.citizen-times.com. Contact the Citizen Times for questions or to report issues via email at cizitentimes@gannett.com or 1-800-672-2472.

Operating hours are:

Monday-Friday: 8:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m.

Saturday: 7:00 a.m. -11:00 a.m. for technical support only

Sunday: 7:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Holidays: 7:00 a.m.-10:00 a.m.

Full access subscriptions

Subscribe and save today by visiting citizen-times.com/subscribe. Subscriptions below are billed per month and include access to citizen-times.com, tablet and smartphone apps, and the e-Edition, a digital replica of the print edition.

● Delivery of the Sunday through Friday print editions up to \$68.00/month*

● Delivery of the Sunday and Wednesday print editions up to \$32.00/month*

*Plus applicable taxes

Corrections and clarifications

Our goal is to promptly correct errors. Email us at accuracy@asheville.gannett.com to report a mistake or call 828-232-5829. Describe the error, where you saw it, the date, page number, or the URL.

Contact us

Customer Service

News Director

Advertising

Obituaries

1-800-672-2472

Jewell Walston | 828-232-5829

828-252-5611

828-232-5966

Postal information

The Citizen Times, USPS# 236-000, ISSN# 0336-0000, is published 6 days per week excluding Saturday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve by Gannett Media Corp, 14 O. Henry Ave., Asheville, NC 28802. Periodicals postage paid at Asheville, NC and additional mailing offices. **Postmaster:** Please send address changes to Customer Service, PO Box 5830, Augusta, GA 30916.

The leading consumer reporting agency conducted a 16 month outdoor test of water guard guards in 2010 and recognized LeafFilter as the "#1 rated professionally installed gutter guard system in America." For those who qualify, One coupon per household. No obligation estimate valid for 1 year. *Must present at time of estimate. See Representative for full warranty details. Manufactured in Plainfield, Michigan and processed at LMT Mercier Group in Ohio. CSLBE 1035795 DOP# #170783658-6501 License# 7656 License# 50145 License# 41354 License# 99338 License# 128344 License# 218294 License# 603 233 977 License# 2102212986 License# 2106212946 License# 2705132153A License# LEAFFNW822JZ License# WV056912 License# WV-29989-417 Nassau HC License# H10670000 Registration# 176447 Registration# HC.0649905 Registration# C127229 Registration# C127230 Registration# 366920918 Registration# PC6475 Registration# IR731804 Registration# 13VH09953900 Registration# PA069383 Suffolk HC License# 52229-H License# 2705169445 License# 262000022