



Mount Noble Lookout Tower – Qualla Boundary, NC

Length	Difficulty	Streams	Views	Solitude	Camping
5.2 mls	★	N/A	★	★	N/A
Hiking Time: 3 hours with 45 minutes of breaks Elev. Gain: 1,590 ft Parking: Park at the large lot for the Fire Mountain Trail System.					

[Click Here For Detailed Location](#)



By Trail Contributor: Zach Robbins

The overlooked Mount Noble Lookout Tower in the Qualla Boundary of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians provides fantastic views of the mountain ranges surrounding Cherokee, NC. The route to the summit, the Fire Tower Trail, is part of the excellent, new Fire Mountain Trail System located minutes from downtown Cherokee in the upper parking lot of the Oconaluftee Indian Village. For the first third of the hike, you'll pass by multiple mountain biking trails through open hardwood forests. After the third trail crossing the Fire Tower Trail leaves the mountain biking system behind, climbing the southwest side of Mount Noble. This hike is not for the faint-hearted. The trail climbs approximately 1,600 feet in 2.6 miles. There is rarely a flat section to regain your breath. Despite the difficulty of this short hike, the trail is in excellent condition and easy to follow. You'll finish at the southern subpeak of Mount Noble, which is home to the lookout tower and multiple communication towers. The steel Aermotor tower, built in 1957, is 60 feet tall. Even though the tower is in shoddy aesthetic condition, the windowless cab has tremendous 360° views. To enjoy these views, you'll need to use extreme caution since half of the floor boards are missing in the tower cab. Despite these drawbacks, the views from the Mount Noble lookout tower are amongst the best in the region. The Great Smoky, Plott Balsam, Great Balsam, Cowee, Alarka, Nantahala, and Cheoah Mountain ranges are in full view surrounding the tower. There is arguably no better view of the Plott Balsam crest in the state. Despite the condition of the lookout tower, it remains open to the public and is well worth a visit.

- ▶ **Mile 0.0** – Park at the large lot for the Fire Mountain Trail System, located on the upper edge of the Oconaluftee Indian Village. The Fire Tower Trail (*pink sign*) begins on the right. A large trail system information board is located at the end of the parking lot.
- ▶ **Mile 0.1** – The trail turns left at a junction with two paths. An old trail stays right heading uphill and a driveway connector to a private home is located on the left.
- ▶ **Mile 0.3** – Walk straight through a cross junction with the Uktena Trail (*blue sign*).
- ▶ **Mile 0.7** – Cross junction with the Kessel Run Trail (*red sign*).
- ▶ **Mile 0.8** – Cross junction with the Spearfinger Trail (*blue sign*). This is the last junction with mountain biking trails within the Fire Mountain Trail System.
- ▶ **Mile 1.4** – The trail dives into a narrow cove and crosses Owl Branch.
- ▶ **Mile 2.0** – At a left turn an old forest road continues to the right. The trail now follows a wide forest road.
- ▶ **Mile 2.2** – T-junction with a spur trail on the left to Mount Noble Rd.
- ▶ **Mile 2.4** – Junction with Mount Noble Rd. Turn right following the gravel road to the summit.
- ▶ **Mile 2.6** – The road ends at a southern subpeak of Mount Noble which is home to multiple communication towers and the Mount Noble lookout tower. The subpeak is at an elevation of 3,840 feet while the true summit of Mount Noble is a half-mile to the north on the national park border at 4,066 feet. The steel Aermotor lookout tower was original built in 1957 and is 60 feet tall. The tower is currently open to the public, but *if you decide to climb it use extreme cation*. The bottom stairwell is missing its railings, which is more of an issue coming down. Structurally, the steel tower is in solid condition but aesthetically, it needs a lot of work. The tower cab is riddled with bullet holes and graffiti, is windowless, and is missing half of its floor boards. When you reach the cab, you need to move slowly and pick your footing carefully to avoid a catastrophic fall. We recommend keeping your feet on the edges of the steel cab and on the floor boards directly resting on steel beams.

The Mount Noble lookout tower provides outstanding 360° views of the region. Newton Bald is the wide mountain north behind the summit of Mount Noble. To the left of Newton Bald in the distance is Clingmans Dome, the tallest peak in the Great Smoky Mountains. The large pyramidal Cheoah Bald rises high above Fontana Lake and the Nantahala Gorge to the southwest. The northern Nantahala Mountains begin in the south behind the Alarka Mountains and to the left of the Cheoah Mountains. The Cowee and Alarka Mountains comprise the massive swath of peaks due south across the Soco Valley. On the far left of the range is Cowee Bald, home to a lookout tower and the tallest peak in the range complex. The western edge of the Great Balsam Mountains is located southeast behind Cowee Bald. The most impressive view is immediately east of the Plott Balsam Mountains above Cherokee. The highest peaks in the Plott Balsams are all evident, including four peaks higher than 6,000 feet. Waterrock Knob is the highest peak in the range, located on the left side of the crest. Immediately north of the Plott Balsams on the north side of Soco Gap are the southeastern Great Smoky Mountains. The southernmost peaks lie on Heintooga Ridge. Barnett Knob is also home to a lookout tower, rising high above downtown Cherokee. The sharp-topped peak on the right of Barnett Knob is Bunches Bald. The immense ridge to the northeast is the Balsam Mountain transverse chain, which blocks views of Mount Sterling Ridge. Many of the tallest, most isolated peaks in the Great Smokies are located in the distant northeast.

- ▶ **May 2018 Update - BIA Forestry has rebuilt the chain link fence around the base of the tower, closing it until further notice.**

Mile 5.2 – Hike ends back at the Fire Mountain Trail System parking lot.