

# MOUNTAINS

## What's the rub with Charlies Bunion?

**Mike Hembree**  
Word from the Smokies

Charlies Bunion will never be mistaken for one of the Great Smoky Mountains' majestic peaks.

It is rugged and ragged — a sort of obstructive bump on the landscape near Mount Le Conte, its much more impressive neighbor. But the Bunion is worth a look, either onsite or from nearby trails. And in a park noted for ridge after ridge of unusual names, Charlies Bunion stands tall.

Although there has always been a certain amount of curiosity surrounding the name of outcropping, about the only thing that seems to be universally true about its origins is that it involved one of Charlie Connor's feet. Beyond that foothold, there is confusion.

Ken Wise, professor and Smokies historian at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, tells the most familiar version of the story:

"Horace Kephart and George Masa (whose photographs were instrumental in the park's formation) were camping out somewhere in the upper Bradley Fork drainage, and Charlie Connor was their guide. Both Kephart and Masa were on the North Carolina Nomenclature Committee, and thus it was their responsibility to identify names for the various Smoky Mountain landmarks on the North Carolina side of the mountain (although Charlies Bunion is on the Tennessee side). Masa and Connor went exploring along the main Smoky divide and climbed over the knob that later became known as Charlies Bunion. Back at camp, Connor was describing to Kephart the shape of the rocky outcrop-

ping, which he depicted as being like the bunion on his toe. Kephart responded to Connor with a remark about naming the knob 'Charlies Bunion.' Kephart followed through, and the name soon became official."

Other versions of the Bunion naming toe a different line, however.

Research by Janet McCue, co-author of "Back of Beyond: A Horace Kephart Biography," produced an article from the Jan. 11, 1948, edition of the Knoxville News-Sentinel that tells an alternate story. Hugh F. Hoss, a writer for the Sentinel, met Connor when they shared a room in a Knoxville hospital that year. Charlie shared the Bunion story with Hoss.

"Charlie didn't actually have a bunion on either of his feet — doesn't now, but he suffered from ingrowing toenails and referred to them as his 'bunion,'" Hoss wrote. The story continued to describe the hike with Kephart and Masa. "When we went over this little knoll, my feet were hurtin' ... and we talked about it," Connor told Hoss. "I said I guessed this place was just my bunion. So when we got to camp, I told Kephart, 'I've found my bunion.' He said, 'Good; we'll put it down on a Government map.' They did just that."

In "Place Names of the Smokies," Allen R. Coggins writes that the Bunion's name origin has been "variously interpreted by numerous writers" but adds that the essence of the story includes Connor "hobbling along" on the trip with Kephart as they surveyed erosion damage from a powerful storm. "When interviewed later about the incident, Conner did not recall having a bunion," Coggins wrote.

Smokies historian Michael Frome confirms that part of the story in "Strangers in High Places," his history of the park. Frome wrote that he interviewed Connor at his home in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, when Connor was in his 70s. He asked about the bunion, and Connor said he didn't have one. "He couldn't quite recollect whether he had been afflicted with an ingrown toenail, a turned ankle, or a sore foot," Frome wrote. "It must have been one of those three because he had removed his shoe, whereupon Kephart, gifted with imagination, volunteered, 'I'm going to get this put on a Government map for you.'"

A final element that adds to the confusion surrounding Charlies Bunion is that — like any other site in the Smokies with a seemingly possessive name — it never received its possessive apostrophe. When you see it written that way (Charlies Bunion), it isn't a misprint. Give credit — or blame — for this to the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, which banished possessive apostrophes for geographic place names long ago.

The full story of the Bunion's naming might never be known. The name game was quite laissez-faire in those days as, across the Appalachians, new settlers were rebranding mountains and other features that Native Americans had originally named. Nevertheless, its labeling on various park maps certainly gives the site more prominence — so to speak — than if it carried a less colorful name like Maple Point or Park Rock. The name "Charlies Bunion" at least sparks curiosity.

Those interested in having the Bunion experience can start at the Newfound Gap parking lot on U.S. 441. A

round-trip hike from Newfound Gap to the Bunion is about 8 miles, including some relatively steep terrain, so it's not a trip to approach casually — and definitely not with brand-new boots. Roots and rocks must be navigated here and there, but the views along the way are spectacular on a clear day.

To reach the feature, walk east from Newfound Gap on the Appalachian Trail for about 4 miles. You can see Charlies Bunion from the trail ridge, and a short spur trail off the AT provides access to the Bunion itself.

Hikers using the Boulevard Trail via the AT to go to the summit of Mount Le Conte sometimes put in extra mileage to visit the Bunion.

If you're looking for the guy who was inspired by Charlie's story enough to name this feature "Charlies Bunion," you'll pass his namesake — Mount Kephart — on the way to your overlook, close to the AT's junction with the Boulevard Trail.

McCue also reports that when Masa Knob, a peak halfway between Charlies Bunion and Mount Kephart, was officially approved in 1961, Charlie Connor quipped, "I am glad Masa had this honor close to my Bunion" (Knoxville Journal, May 17, 1961).

Mike Hembree is a veteran journalist and the author of 14 books. He has visited 26 national parks and hopes to add many more to that list. Reach him at [paperinker@aol.com](mailto:paperinker@aol.com) and read more of his work as a contributor to Smokies LIVE at [SmokiesInformation.org](http://SmokiesInformation.org).

## North Carolina

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seats in the state House and all 50 seats of the state Senate are up for election.

If the Republicans win at least 72 House seats and at least 30 Senate seats, they will be able to override most vetoes at will starting in January 2023. In November, the GOP needs to pick up just three House seats and two Senate seats to reach veto-proof supermajorities.

Even if they win big in November, the Republican lawmakers may consider public opinion before banning abortion next year.

According to a public opinion poll of

North Carolina voters conducted in April by Meredith College, 52.6% wanted the state to continue allowing abortions as has been permitted until now. Abortion has been legal until approximately the 24th week of pregnancy.

Overall, 61.7% of those surveyed said abortion should be legal until the 15th week of pregnancy.

A similar poll was conducted June 8 to June 12 by SurveyUSA for television news station WRAL. It framed its questions somewhat differently from the Meredith poll. It said 45% of respondents did not want the Supreme Court to overturn Roe vs. Wade and 55% wanted N.C. abortion laws to either stay the same as now or become less restrictive.

However, the results of WRAL's survey also say:

- 57% of North Carolinians would restrict abortions after the 20th week of pregnancy, and 31% oppose doing that, with 12% not sure.

- 45% would restrict abortion after the sixth week of pregnancy and 39% oppose this. The remaining 15% were unsure.

SurveyUSA said it surveyed 1,100 adults and the credibility interval, which is similar to a margin of error, is plus-or-minus 3.8%.

### Abortions are likely to increase in NC

Friday's abortion ruling portends an increase in the number of abortions in North Carolina as it remains legal here but is banned or curtailed in nearby states, experts have said.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, an abortion rights organization, most states in the South are expected to reduce or end access to abortion. That would leave North Carolina as the nearest place for hundreds of thousands, and possibly millions of women, to obtain abortions, it said.

North Carolina abortion providers recently said they are preparing for an increase in out-of-state patients.

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services reports that in 2020, 30,004 abortions were performed in this state. There were 25,058 for North Carolina residents and 4,946 for women from other states.

The USA TODAY Network reported that among states that border North Carolina:

- Tennessee has a "trigger ban" — a ban on abortion that would be triggered by a Supreme Court ruling to overturn Roe vs. Wade. That could take 30 days to take effect. In the meantime, other Tennessee laws that restrict abortion would take effect, including a ban on abortions after the sixth week of pregnancy.
- Georgia has a sixth-week "fetal heartbeat" law that it could seek to enforce with the overturn of Roe.
- South Carolina also has a law ban-

ning abortion after six weeks, but that has been unenforced per court order. The Supreme Court's ruling brings that law back into play.

### A ban on abortions after 20 weeks takes effect in North Carolina

A ban on abortions following the 20th week of gestation is already on North Carolina's statutes. But until now, that law was unenforceable because of the Supreme Court's 1973 Roe vs. Wade ruling and a related case from 1992, called Planned Parenthood vs. Casey.

That law becomes enforceable with the new ruling, said constitutional law professor Theodore Shaw at the University of North Carolina School of Law.

That law says abortions after the 20th week of pregnancy are allowed only in a medical emergency in which the continued pregnancy threatens to kill the mother or cause "substantial and irreversible physical impairment of a major bodily function."

As a practical matter, few abortions would be stopped by a 20-week law.

According to a study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, nationwide in 2016, only 1.2% of all abortions were done after the 20th week of gestation. It says 91% were done no later than the 13th week.

In detail, out of more than 431,000 abortions in 40 states and New York City in 2016:

- 65.5% were performed no later than the eighth week of gestation.
- 25.5% were done in the 9th to 13th weeks.
- 3.6% were in the 14th and 15th weeks.
- 2.1% were in the 16th and 17th weeks.
- 2% were in the 18th and 20th weeks.
- 1.2% were in pregnancies of 21 weeks or longer.

Senior North Carolina reporter Paul Woolverton can be reached at 910-261-4710 and [pwoolverton@gannett.com](mailto:pwoolverton@gannett.com).

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