

Trail to Nitro Caves from Corbett's Gap – Knuckles Range

Trail Difficulty: Easy | Moderate | Strenuous | Tough

Trail Head: Corbett's Gap on Hunnasgiriya - Meemure Road .

Nearest Town: Hunnasgiriya

Nearest City: Kandy

Access to Trail head:

Route to Corbett's Gap

Colombo -> Kandy[A1] -> Hunnasgiriya[A26] -> Loolwatta -> Corbett's Gap

Total distance from Colombo is 170km. Paved roads all the way from Colombo. Condition of the road stretch from Hunnasgiriya can vary from good to bad depending on the level of maintenance. Generally this stretch can be tackled by an ordinary car.

Trail End: Nitro Caves

Total Length: 11 km

Elevation Gain: 800m (Elevation at Trail Head: 1216m | Elevation at Trail End: 676m | Lowest point Elevation: 450m).

Approximate time: 5 hours

Hiking Season: Best months are February to September

Permit Required: NO

Nitro cave is a large cave hidden deep in the southern parts of Knuckles Mountains. Inhabited by hundreds of thousands of bats for possibly many hundred thousand years had made this cave a rich deposit of saltpeter (potassium nitrate) traditionally used to make gun powder.

It is believed that this cave was used as a source of saltpeter by rulers of Sri Lanka for more than thousand five hundred years.

Trail to nitro caves start off from the scenic, highest-altitude point of the road from Hunnasgiriya to "Meemure". This highest altitude point is called Corbett's Gap (Sinhala: Attala-mettuwa) and "Meemure" is one of the traditional villages hidden deep inside knuckles.

The trail from Corbett's gap winds down through the unique eco-system of Knuckles mountain range, possibly the only one of its kind in the entire world. The trail then branches off from Meemure road and move towards the Kumbukgolla traditional village. From Kumbukgolla village a narrow nature trail through the Knuckles forest climbs up to the nitro cave.

Please note that it is possible to drive up to Kumbukgolla village if you got a 4WD. If you do that the last 1.2 km trail to Nitro caves is of moderate difficulty and will take about 1.5 hrs. Still there are many reasons to walk all the way instead of driving. Read below to find out why.

0 to 5km: From Corbet's Gap (**Waypoint: NC01**) walk along the road towards Meemure. As you start you will experience the climate of a high altitude forest. The view all around is magnificent. From Corbet's gap you can see several mountain peaks of Knuckles Range such as Kalupahana, Lakegala and Dumbanagala and all most up to the Indian Ocean off eastern Sri Lanka.

As you walk towards Meemure, you will experience a steep descend. The road alternatively moves in to forest and come back to the edge of the mountains giving you an opportunity to enjoy the magnificent views of the mountain ranges. You will be walking 5km along this road, descending approximately 500m from the elevation at the Corbett's gap. On this stretch, not only you will see the vegetation changing from high altitude forest to low altitude forest, you will also "feel" the climate change.

Even though you can drive this stretch, we recommend you to trek instead, because walking will let you experience the climate change better, something that is very difficult to experience anywhere else in the world. Walking will also give you adequate time to enjoy the landscape and observe some of the rarest birds, butterflies and reptiles, especially lizards.

Your walk along the Meemure road ends at a point where there is a sharp bend to your left and a by road to your right (**Waypoint: NC13**). This by road, a jeep track for all practical purposes, leads to the Kumbukgolla traditional village.

5km to 9.8km: As you start walking on Kumbukgolla road you will cross a large stream in about 200m (**Waypoint: NC14**). This is one of several water sources you will find on this trail.

Road to Kumbukgolla pre-dominantly winds through a tropical rain forest, occasionally reaching the edge of the mountains providing great views in to the mountains.

In about 2.2km from the turn-off from Meemure road, you will reach Kumbukgolla Village. Few houses and the Kumbukgolla primary school will be amongst the first signs you see (**Waypoint: NC22**) of the village. This is a traditional village hidden in the middle of the Knuckles range completely surrounded by forest covered mountains.

As you walk through the village occasionally you will reach points where you can see the panoramic view of mountains on far left hand side. You will see beautiful paddy fields of villages such as "Kayikawala" and "Meemure" covering mountain sides with narrow green steps (**Waypoint: NC27**).

About 9 km from the trail head, the jeep track will again move in to the forest (**Waypoint: NC29**). For about 500m you will see no signs of the village.

You have to walk to the end of the jeep track (**Waypoint: NC34**) which is 4.8 km from the turn-off from Meemure road. At this point you have completed 9.8km from Corbet's gap.

The entire 4.8km of the jeep track to Kumbukgolla from Meemure road is a continuous climb down. There are points where you will see by roads branching from the main jeep track. These are at waypoints: **NC19** (1.76km), **NC27** (3.16km) and **NC30** (4.15km). Remember to stick to the main jeep track avoiding the by roads.

9.8km to 11km: Once you reach the end of the jeep track start climbing down on the foot path on to your left. As you walk about 100m you will see the trail making a slight left turn in a section paved with stones (**Waypoint: NC 35**). You are now walking towards the forest covered mountain where the Nitro Caves are located which you can see in front above the forest. Continue to walk along the foot path passing small paddy plots, village houses and chena. After about 350m from where the jeep track ended, the trail enters a bushy forest patch (**Waypoint: NC38**).

After walking through the forest patch for about 350m you will reach a point where you will find a trail taking a steep descend towards a house on your left hand side (**Waypoint:NC42**). Don't climb down from here. As you walk about 100m along the trail you will find a similar trail on to your left climbing down to a river (**waypoint:NC44**). Take this trail and climb down to the river. In about 50m, you will be on a large bed rock the stream flows over and drops about 10m down creating a mini waterfall (**Waypoint:NC45**). From here, turn right, walk about 20m along the bed rock crossing the stream and find the continuation of the trail in to the forest (**Waypoint: NC46**). This is the lowest point of the hike with an elevation of 451m, also this is the last reliable water source.

As you move in to the forest you will encounter a very steep climb for about 40m or so. After that the climb will become moderate with occasional steep stretches. At about 75m from the stream, the trail takes a slight right turn and continues its climb up (**Waypoint: NC49**). About 250m from the stream you will pass an area which looks like a dry stream with a large rocks on the right side (**Waypoint: NC 52**). Passing this, in another 50m the trail starts the last 50m of steep climb at a point where there are two large trees with ash color bark next to each other. (**Waypoint: NC 53**). Passing this point and, climbing through two large boulders reach the opening of the Nitro Cave (**Waypoint: NC55**). Enjoy the stunning view of Lakegala Peak straight in front of the cave over the forest.

Tips, Notes & special remarks:

- Make sure that you carry a water bottle. Most part of the trail can be quite dry during the dry month and water sources can become limited.
- Drinking water from streams is safe.
- Last 1.2km of the trail is infected with leaches. Make sure that you either wear leach proof socks or carry a repellent.
- Extremely strong winds can be experienced around the Corbett's gap during the months of July and August.

- Weather in the Knuckles range is extremely unpredictable, thick mist can cover mountains in a matter of minutes. Be prepared for rain.

Way Points

| | N: dd° mm.mmm' | E: dd° mm.mmm' | Elevation |
|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|
| NC01 – Corbett's Gap | 7° 22.367' | 80° 50.448' | 1216 m |
| NC02 | 7° 22.485' | 80° 50.567' | 1159 m |
| NC03 | 7° 22.583' | 80° 50.536' | 1106 m |
| NC04 | 7° 22.543' | 80° 50.283' | 1042 m |
| NC05 | 7° 22.664' | 80° 50.394' | 1009 m |
| NC06 | 7° 22.767' | 80° 50.378' | 957 m |
| NC07 | 7° 22.922' | 80° 50.460' | 925 m |
| NC08 | 7° 22.955' | 80° 50.502' | 916 m |
| NC09 | 7° 23.105' | 80° 50.489' | 880 m |
| NC10 | 7° 23.241' | 80° 50.450' | 845 m |
| NC11 | 7° 23.314' | 80° 50.553' | 820 m |
| NC12 | 7° 23.303' | 80° 50.383' | 775 m |
| NC13 – Kumbukgolla Road | 7° 23.392' | 80° 50.437' | 750 m |
| NC14 | 7° 23.392' | 80° 50.527' | 742 m |
| NC15 | 7° 23.499' | 80° 50.495' | 726 m |
| NC16 | 7° 23.571' | 80° 50.495' | 725 m |
| NC17 | 7° 23.719' | 80° 50.621' | 691 m |
| NC18 | 7° 23.857' | 80° 50.777' | 664 m |
| NC19 | 7° 24.014' | 80° 50.830' | 641 m |
| NC20 | 7° 23.994' | 80° 50.888' | 636 m |
| NC21 | 7° 24.015' | 80° 50.946' | 628 m |
| NC22 | 7° 24.012' | 80° 50.963' | 622 m |
| NC23 | 7° 24.065' | 80° 51.052' | 613 m |
| NC24 | 7° 24.103' | 80° 51.040' | 608 m |
| NC25 | 7° 24.267' | 80° 51.065' | 593 m |
| NC26 | 7° 24.308' | 80° 51.041' | 577 m |
| NC27 | 7° 24.386' | 80° 51.035' | 595 m |
| NC28 | 7° 24.599' | 80° 51.142' | 610 m |
| NC29 | 7° 24.734' | 80° 51.165' | 585 m |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------|-------|
| NC30 | 7° 24.820' | 80° 51.154' | 562 m |
| NC31 | 7° 24.887' | 80° 51.222' | 527 m |
| NC32 | 7° 24.947' | 80° 51.281' | 536 m |
| NC33 | 7° 24.967' | 80° 51.325' | 534 m |
| NC34 – End Jeep Track | 7° 25.009' | 80° 51.426' | 520 m |
| NC35 | 7° 25.042' | 80° 51.472' | 499 m |
| NC36 | 7° 25.062 | 80° 51.495' | 484 m |
| NC37 | 7° 25.079' | 80° 51.516' | 486 m |
| NC38 | 7° 25.095' | 80° 51.544' | 476 m |
| NC39 | 7° 25.103' | 80° 51.556' | 482 m |
| NC40 | 7° 25.113' | 80° 51.614' | 482 m |
| NC41 | 7° 25.061' | 80° 51.676' | 493 m |
| NC42 | 7° 25.046' | 80° 51.710' | 487 m |
| NC43 | 7° 25.038' | 80° 51.723' | 487 m |
| NC44 | 7° 25.025' | 80° 51.772' | 469 m |
| NC45 | 7° 25.013' | 80° 51.830' | 436 m |
| NC46 | 7° 24.998' | 80° 51.838' | 451 m |
| NC47 | 7° 25.020' | 80° 51.862' | 473 m |
| NC48 | 7° 25.044' | 80° 51.899' | 490 m |
| NC49 | 7° 25.055' | 80° 51.964' | 517 m |
| NC50 | 7° 25.037' | 80° 52.045' | 559 m |
| NC51 | 7° 25.044' | 80° 52.092' | 574 m |
| NC52 | 7° 25.050' | 80° 52.143' | 585 m |
| NC53 | 7° 25.068' | 80° 52.189' | 619 m |
| NC54 | 7° 25.061' | 80° 52.212' | 635 m |
| NC55 – Nitro Cave | 7° 25.064' | 80° 52.232' | 673 m |