

# Autumn hike on Elk Creek Trail

BY EVELYN ROETHER

Greetings, fellow hikers! It's not too late to hit the high country—get out there while you still can! The Elk Creek Trail takes you through magnificent old-growth conifer forests and subalpine meadows that provide some nice fall color.

## Elk Creek Trail #1230

- Difficulty: Difficult
- Distance: Four miles round trip
- Elevation gain: 2,100 feet
- Access: Mid June - late October
- Map: Grayback Mountain USGS quad

## Directions

From downtown Williams stay on Williams Highway (which turns into Cedar Flat Road) for about three miles. Turn left on Caves Camp Road. After 6.7 miles, the pavement ends. Continue uphill, staying right on the main road at all intersections. After 3.7 miles, turn left at the intersection onto Road 079 through the open yellow gate. Continue 1.6 miles, watching for the Elk Creek Trail sign next to a stream on the left.

*Note:* The gate at Road 079 is usually closed from late fall through early spring.

The Elk Creek trail is one of the quickest access points to the Siskiyou high country and the Boundary Trail system. This two-mile steep trail ascends to the ridge, taking you through a lush old-growth forest of Douglas fir, Port Orford cedar, and Shasta red fir. The forest floor is comprised of shade-loving plants, including vanilla leaf, red currant, gooseberry, Oregon grape, and thimbleberry under a mixed forest of conifers and maples.

Generally following the north-facing Elk Creek drainage, the trail zigzags its way 2,100 feet up to its terminus at the quaint Sparlin Camp, which sits on a saddle along the Boundary Trail. Occasional views of the backside of

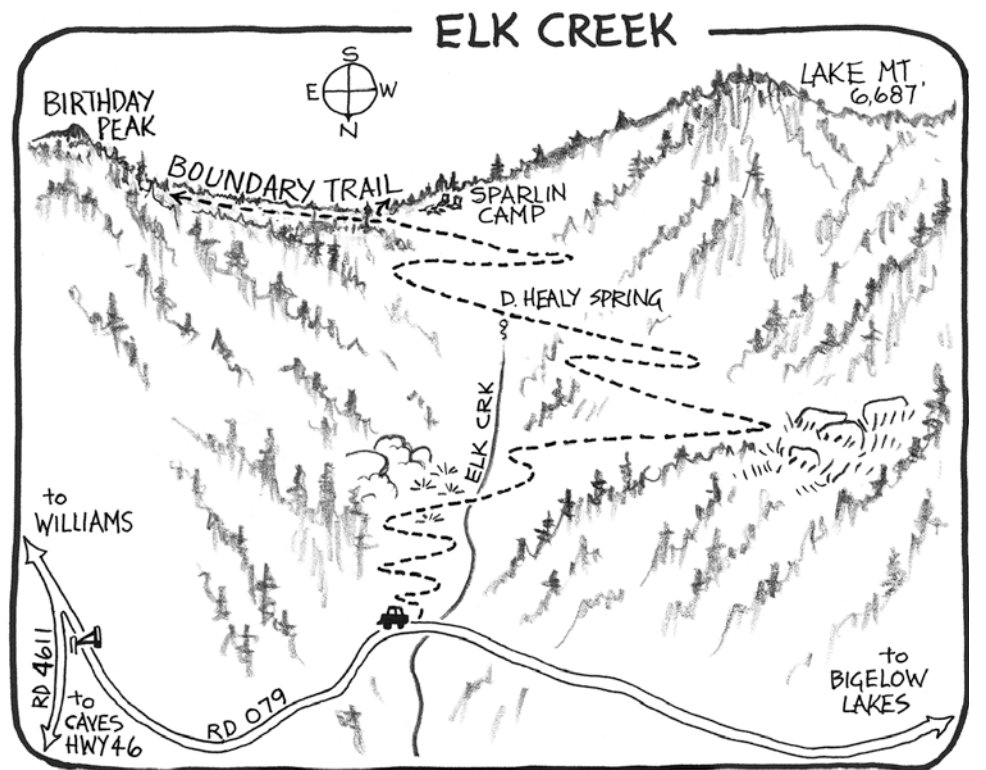
Grayback Mountain in the distance to the east will delight you, as will the beauty of the intact forest ecosystem.

About halfway up, the trail crosses Elk Creek and then weaves through a classic Siskiyou high-country meadow, offering a plethora of flowers such as monkshood, larkspur, and both red and blue elderberries in midsummer. A quarter mile past the meadow, watch for a sign on the downhill side of the trail announcing "D. Healy Spring," where you can fill your water bottle with some of the sweetest water on earth.

Once you reach the ridgetop, covered with a field of yellow sulphur flowers, Sparlin Camp is just to the right amid a grove of large firs. This old hunting camp has been used for generations by locals and is named for the Sparlin family, who were early settlers in the Williams Valley. Sparlin Camp marks the end of the Elk Creek Trail and a junction with the Boundary Trail.

To extend your trek beyond Sparlin Camp, turn east (left) across the saddle onto the Boundary Trail for another steep 0.6-mile climb to Birthday Peak (6,240 feet, with phenomenal views out toward Mt. Shasta and the Red Buttes) and continue three more miles to Grayback Mountain. Going west (right) on the Boundary Trail will take you down into some picturesque subalpine meadows above Sturgis Fork Creek. One more option is to take a right at the old Sparlin campsite, look for the hand-hewn "shortcut" trail sign that directs you onto the ridge going west over the south flanks of Lake Mountain toward Mt. Elijah. Take it all in and return the way you came.

For a description of 19 other trails in our neighborhood, pick up a copy of



*Hiking Trails of the Lower Applegate*, now available at the Williams General Store, Takubeh Natural Market, Provolt Store, Whistling Duck Farm Store, Rebel Heart

Books, Oregon Books and Games, and Bloomsbury Books. Happy hiking!  
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