

# Steep trail through lush forest to the Siskiyou high country

BY EVELYN ROETHER

The Elk Creek Trail is one of the quickest access points to the Siskiyou high country and the Boundary Trail system. This steep 2-mile trail ascends to the ridge, taking you through a lush old growth Douglas fir, Port Orford cedar and Shasta red fir forest. Under a mixed canopy of conifers and maple trees, you will also see the shade-loving vanilla leaf, red currant, gooseberry, Oregon grape and thimbleberry plants. All of these provide a colorful landscape for an autumn hike.

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 mid to late summer. 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 amidst a grove of large firs. This old hunting camp has been used for generations by locals and is named for the Sparlin family, which settled early in the Williams Valley. Sparlin Camp marks the end of the Elk Creek Trail and a junction with the Boundary Trail.

## Want a bit more?

To extend your trek beyond Sparlin Camp, turn east (left) across the saddle onto the Boundary Trail for another steep .6-mile climb to Birthday Peak (6,240 feet) with phenomenal views: Mount Shasta and the Red Buttes, and Grayback Mountain (about 3 miles further). Going west (right) on the Boundary Trail will take you down into some picturesque subalpine meadows above Sturgis Fork Creek. One more option is, at the old Sparlin campsite, to look for the hand-hewn "shortcut" trail sign that directs you onto the ridge going west over the south flanks of Lake Mountain towards Mount Elijah. Take it all in and return the way you came.

## Details

- Difficulty: Difficult
- Distance: 4 miles round-trip
- Elevation gain: 2,100 feet
- Access: Mid June - late October
- Map: Grayback Mountain USGS quad

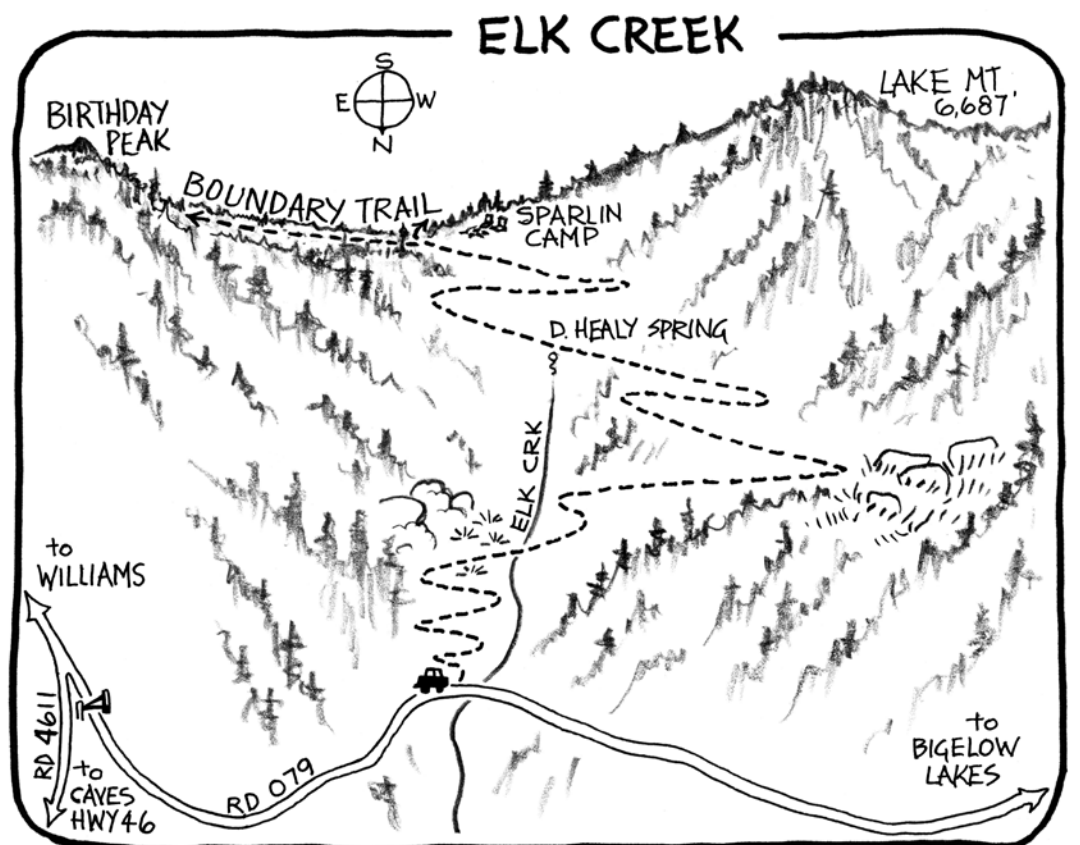


A sign marks the way along the Elk Creek Trail. Photo: Evelyn Roether.

## Directions

From "downtown" Williams stay on Williams Highway (which turns into Cedar Flat Road) for about 3 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.)

*Hiking Trails of the Lower Applegate*, a trail guide describing 20 trails in the Lower Applegate area, is available at the Williams General Store and Takubeh Natural Market in Williams, Provolt Store and Whistling Duck Farm and Store in Provolt, Rebel Heart Books in Jacksonville, Oregon



Map by Ann Gunter.

Books and Games in Grants Pass, and Northwest Nature Shop and Bloomsbury Books in Ashland. Trail guides can also be purchased


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