



PHOTOS BY ZACH URNESS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Hurricane Creek winds toward Sacajawea Peak in the Wallowa Mountains.

An entryway into the Wallowas

Hurricane Creek Trail near Wallowa Lake has options: Easy jaunt to falls, 6-mile day-hike or backpacking trips

ZACH URNESS
STATESMAN JOURNAL

The perfect day-hike is an elusive thing, especially in the Wallowa Mountains.

The titanic range in Eastern Oregon is filled with a boundless supply of trails, but many are steep and challenging.

A leg-burning workout isn't always what visitors to the touristy area of Wallowa Lake and Joseph are seeking.

But there is one trail that offers a day-hike of postcard worthiness without the necessity of going on a death march.

It's called Hurricane Creek Trail.

Located a short drive from Joseph and Enterprise, the trail follows a roaring creek past waterfalls and through forest before entering wildflower-filled meadows in the Eagle Cap Wilderness.

The nice thing about Hurricane Creek is that you can choose from easy, medium and difficult options. While most people hike 6 miles round-trip to Slick Rock Gorge, there are options for a shorter or longer trip.

The only downside is the trail gets crowds on weekends. Get to the trailhead early to avoid parking headaches or busy trail conditions.

The hike begins at Hurricane Creek Trailhead — just 9 miles south of Enterprise.

The first highlight arrives just a short distance from the trailhead. After 0.1 miles, you'll reach a junction with Falls Creek Trail. Take a right here, walk 0.2 miles and you'll be rewarded with views of Falls Creek Falls, a roughly 50-foot waterfall with mountain peaks rising above it.

After taking a few pictures, head back to Hurricane Creek Trail and continue on your way, hiking through a forest that periodically opens to views of massive Sacajawea Peak, which at 9,839 feet is the Wallowa's highest mountain.

After 3 miles, and 760 feet of climb, you'll reach a spectacular meadow surrounded by waterfalls and mountains called Slick Rock Gorge.

This is the turn-around point for most people, but follow the trail another 1.6 miles and you'll reach another, even more impressive meadow with mountain views.

There are periodic campsites along the creek that make for good backpacking spots — especially if you're hiking with kids.

The ultimate destination is deep blue Echo Lake, but that requires almost 8 miles of hiking and a very steep 3,000-foot climb. The trail also accesses the popular Lakes Basin, but that's only for a much longer backpacking adventure.

Hurricane Creek is best for a quick morning day hike, allowing for a wilderness experience without a lung-busting adventure.

Zach Urness has been an outdoors writer, photographer and videographer in Oregon for nine years. He is the author of the book "Hiking Southern Oregon" and can be reached at zurness@StatesmanJournal.com or (503) 399-6801. Find him on Twitter at @ZachsORoutdoors.



Falls Creek Falls is reached in 0.1 mile from the trailhead.



Signs at the Hurricane Creek Trailhead.

Hurricane Creek Trail

In a nutshell: The easiest way to access the Eagle Cap Wilderness in Eastern Oregon's Wallowa Mountains near Joseph, Enterprise and Wallowa Lake

Round trip distances: 0.65 miles to Falls Creek Falls; 6 miles to Slick Rock Gorge; 9 miles to upper meadow; 15.5 miles to Echo Lake

Difficulty: Moderate to Slick Rock Gorge, very difficult to Echo Lake

Fees: \$5 parking fee or Northwest Forest Pass

Camping: Hurricane Creek Campground is a good spot

Directions: From Enterprise, take Hurricane Creek Road, following periodic signs, around 9 miles to the parking lot and trailhead.

Coordinates: N45° 18.691' W117° 18.422'