

Hellgate and Indian Creek offer climb and view

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The air is getting warmer and so is the rock. Time to head out into the great outdoors and climb a crag or two.

Helena's surrounding wilderness is full of many climbing opportunities, some are a drive, but nonetheless they are all great places for beginners all the way up to advanced climbers.

"Anyone can use the areas, but I would recommend going with someone who knows their way around and has some experience with 'real rock' climbing," said Jon Bishop, a junior elementary education major. "I personally love Indian Creek and Hellgate Canyon, both are beautiful and have great rock."

I agree with Bishop wholeheartedly. Whenever I go out for a climb, I either head to Hellgate or Indian Creek. Both are incredible climbing areas; my personal favorite being Hellgate. Even if you don't climb, head out to Hellgate; the scenery is amazing.

To get to Hellgate Canyon head east out of Helena on Custer Avenue? Shortly after passing ShopKo, the road splits left and right. Go right, this road is called Canyon Ferry Road. Continue on this road all the way around the back of Canyon Ferry Lake.

You will pass over a dam, and pass through two little towns. After the second town, the road veers to the left and turns into a gravel road, the first right that you can take will be marked with a small sign that says Hellgate. You will travel a few miles down this road, until you see a sign for a campground on your right, there are two roads here, take the road on the left, this takes you directly into Hellgate Canyon.

The surrounding walls range from rather easy climbs to more technical lead climbs. Don't let "easy" fool you, always go with an experienced climber. Don't take chances. Rock climbing can be very dangerous. Have someone go who knows how to either top rope or lead climb; this remains true with both Hellgate and Indian Creek. On some climbs there is a need to place protection, so be prepared.

To get to Indian Creek head east out of town on Highway 12. Drive roughly 30 miles until on your right you see a sign for Indian Creek, take this road for about three miles until on your left there is a road with "danger blasting area" signs. Don't worry they aren't blasting where you will be climbing (they blast way up in the canyon). Follow this road until towering walls of rock surround you.

Much like Hellgate the climbs can be easy or hard, such as the 'Bear Claw' which is a very easy 5.7 (not vertical, not technical) and 'Chief Big Pockets' which is a more technical but a fun 5.10 (moderately difficult). Take advantage of the incredible scenery and great rock that Indian Creek has to offer.

Remember to have fun and enjoy the beautiful weather, as it is sure to come soon. Most importantly, be safe; climb with someone who knows what they are doing.

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