# Prairie Dog Canyon

A fantastic canyoning adventure located on Prairie Mountain!



Rappel #1 on the First Descent

**Version 1.1**
**May 29, 2024**

**Written by Brendan Clark**

# DISCLAIMER

**<u>Rappelling is very dangerous.</u> Do not attempt this descent route if you are not familiar with techniques to safely descend a rope using bolted anchors. A mistake while rappelling can easily lead to serious injury or death. This canyon is recommended only for individuals who have the skills, equipment and experience necessary to safely set up and perform rappels down steep rock walls. If you do not know what you are doing, hire a mountain guide. The author and canyon developers will not be responsible if you hurt or kill yourself. <u>You are responsible for your own safety.</u> Have fun and play safe!**



Rappel #3 - Slot Canyon!

# Quick Facts About the Canyon!

**Canyon Route Statistics:** 6 bolted rappels, up to 15 m in length. Some rappels are purely vertical.

**Recommended Gear:** 30 m rope, helmet, harness, rappel device, rappel backup (prusik, etc), a similarly equipped and skilled partner.

**Trip Time:** 3 to 6 hours, depending on your approach route and how fast you move.

**Full Distance and Elevation Gain:** Minimum 9 km and 400 m gain.

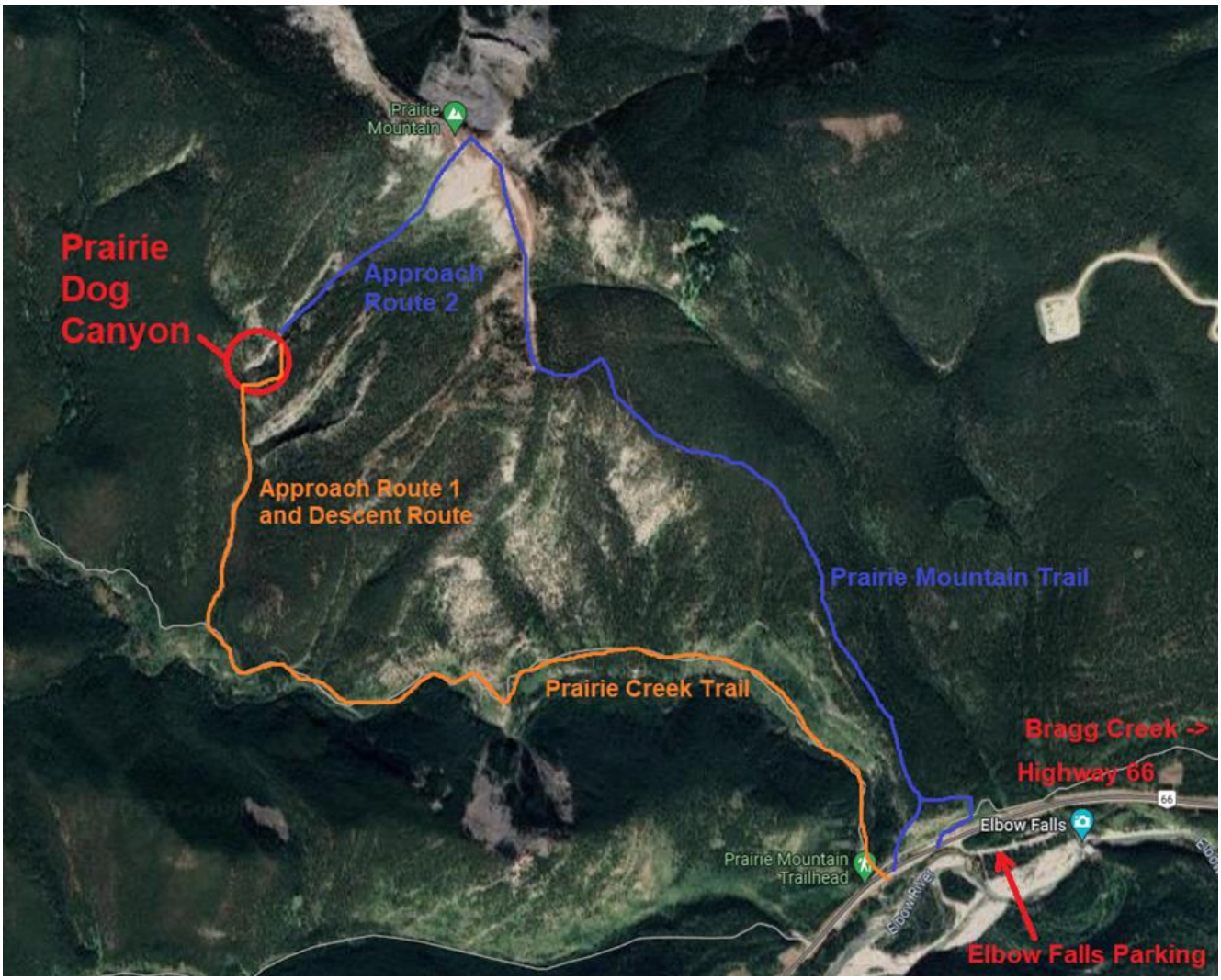
**Naming:** Prairie Dog Canyon seemed like the right name for an easy canyon on Prairie Mountain :)

**Access:** Probably best May through October

**Explored and Developed By:** Brendan Clark, Kris Nielson, Adam Ess

**First Descent:** May 14, 2023

# Where is it?



# Prairie Dog Canyon: History and Beta

I discovered this canyon in early May 2023 while out randomly exploring in the woods. I was impressed with the length of the canyon and the number of rappels that would be involved. It felt appealling to develop as a canyoning descent route considering that it's on Prairie Mountain!

I rounded up some interest with a couple other canyoneering enthusiasts and we went back to the canyon armed with plenty of gear to tackle the descent. We found absolutely no evidence that anybody had ever been down the canyon before. Although we initially didn't plan to bolt all of the rappels, we decided that it ultimately would be best to do so for a more enjoyable experience. After fully cleaning, bolting and descending the canyon, it's now ready for other adventurers to explore!

There are 6 rappels in total, plus potentially one bonus rappel to enter into the top of the canyon. The rappels are off bolted anchors and head down solid, water worn rock. Some of the rappels are purely vertical and are a lot of fun! Others go down slot-like features and are a delight to explore.

When looking for the anchors while descending, here's a guide to which side of the canyon wall they are on: **right, right, right, left, left, left**. The bolted anchors should be easy to find and use.

**Rappel 1:** Anchor on Canyoner's right. A scenic lower-angle rappel, perfect beginning!
**Rappel 2:** Anchor on Canyoner's right. Purely vertical drop! The steepest of the canyon!
**Rappel 3:** Anchor on Canyoner's right. Head down through a neat slot feature!
**Rappel 4:** Anchor on Canyoner's left. Another steep, mostly vertical drop!
**Rappel 5:** Anchor on Canyoner's left. A nice shorter rappel leading into the last!
**Rappel 6:** Anchor on Canyoner's left. The final rappel, short but sweet!

The canyon seems to be dry most of the time, but during peak snowmelt/runoff/rain in May/June there can be a lot of running water flowing down the canyon causing some wet ropes and wet rappels. In later summer the canyon is typically reliably dry with no difficulties due to water.

# How to Get There

## Option 1: Approach from the Prairie Creek Trail

## CLICK HERE FOR A GPX TRACK OF OPTION 1

Park at the Elbow Falls lot and hike west along the Prairie Creek Trail. At the Prairie Creek Trail Drainage Turnoff (coordinates provided on the following page), turn right up a fairly obvious drainage. The drainage is easy to follow upwards. A trail appears and disappears in a few spots. Once you're at the base of the canyon, find the large cairn which marks the route upwards on the right (south) side of the canyon. Grunt up the steep and occasionally loose slope. You can see the canyon to your left as you work up. Stay away from the edge as the rock is very loose near the lip of the canyon. Coordinates are provided to mark the start of the rappel descent - enter the canyon where the steep canyon walls merge at a fairly obvious junction. From here, you can carefully scramble down for about 3-4 meters down a 4th class step. If this feels too challenging - not to worry! **There's a chained tree anchor that you can use to rappel down into the canyon.** If you choose to rappel, be sure that there's nobody below you as there is a rockfall hazard (and don't stand below other people rappelling). Enjoy the canyon, then descend back out via Prairie Creek.

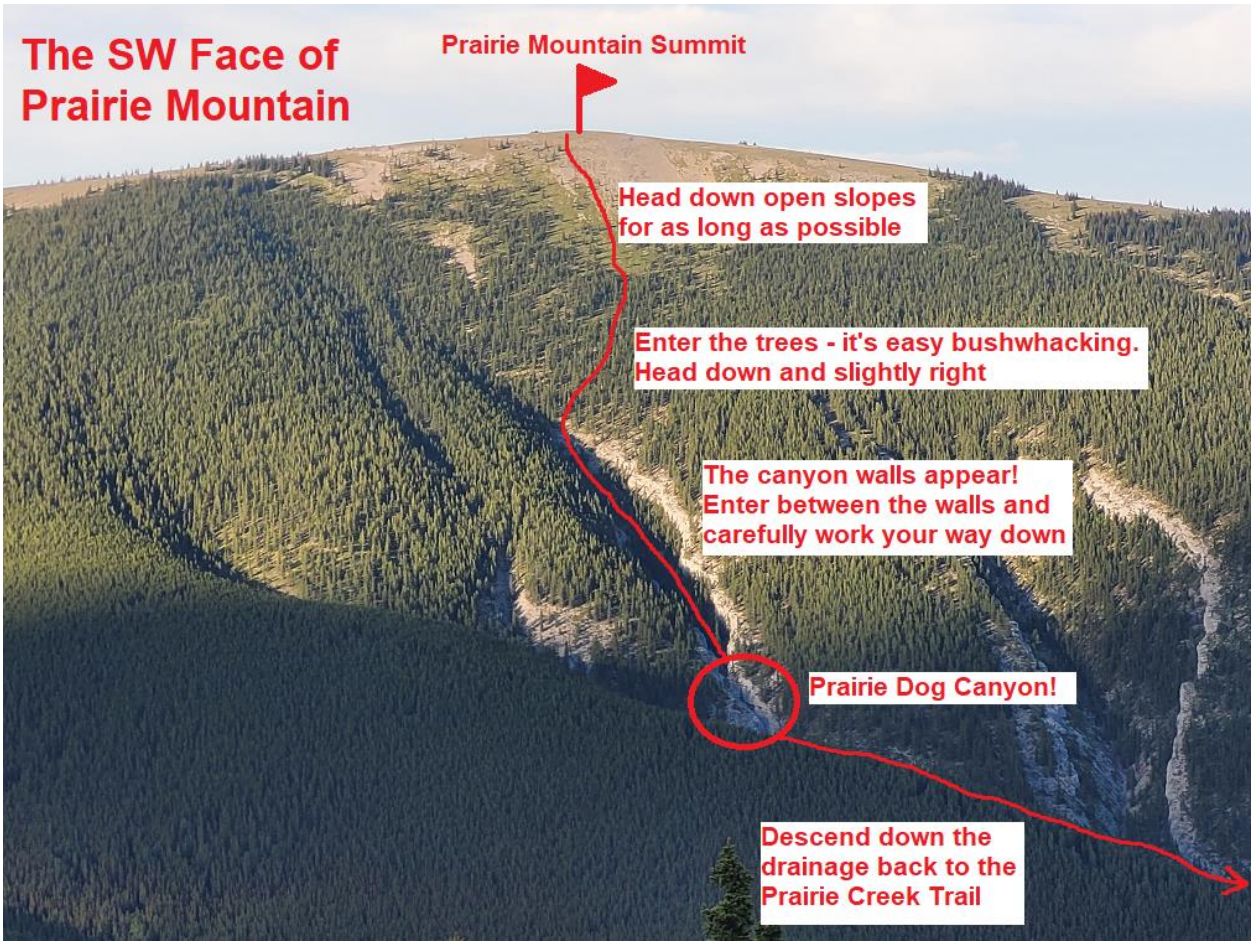
**Option 1 Distance and Elevation Gain:** 4.6 km, 300 m gain, 1 to 2 hours one way.
Full day is 9 km, 400 m gain, 3 to 6 hours.

## Option 2: Approach from the Summit of Prairie Mountain

## CLICK HERE FOR A GPX TRACK OF OPTION 2

Prairie Dog Canyon actually makes for an excellent and highly recommended loop by going up and over the summit of Prairie Mountain! Take the normal Prairie Mountain trail to the summit of the mountain (new trail as of September 2023). From the summit cairn, descend down the open rocky slopes to the SW. Follow the open slopes for as long as you can, then finally enter the trees when you are forced to. The bushwhacking is easy. Head slightly right as you go down. Eventually you will see the walls of the canyon below you - head straight between the walls down the centre gut of the canyon. There's a bit of bushwhacking and scrambling, but nothing too difficult. The canyon walls will slowly start to squeeze together until you reach the first rappel. Enjoy the canyon then descend the drainage back to Prairie Creek. Then simply follow the Prairie Creek Trail back east - you'll end up back at the base of Prairie Mountain back where you started.

**Option 2 Distance and Elevation Gain:** 4.5 km, 700 m gain, 450 m loss to the start of the canyon. 2 to 3 hours. Full day is 9 km, 800 m gain, 4 to 6 hours.




# Key Coordinates

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Prairie Creek Parking Lot: | N 50° 51.942 | W 114° 47.387 | (50.865700, -114.789783) |
| Start of Prairie Dog Canyon: | N 50° 52.941 | W 114° 49.002 | (50.882350, -114.816700) |
| End of Prairie Dog Canyon: | N 50° 52.901 | W 114° 49.059 | (50.881683, -114.817650) |
| Prairie Creek Trail Drainage Turnoff: | N 50° 52.443 | W 114° 49.162 | (50.874050, -114.819367) |

# Safety Note

There is a lot of loose rock in and around Prairie Dog Canyon. The rappels are generally down very solid rock, but the edges of the canyon are choss. Be VERY careful if you are on the edge of the canyon or if there is somebody above you. Don't get close to the edge if you are at the top of the canyon - a slip on the loose rock could end up being quite a tumble. As the photos should make clear, climbing gear is mandatory to complete the descent down Prairie Dog Canyon. Without proper gear, you will risk serious injury or death attempting to descend this canyon. Note that despite there being good cell coverage on the summit of Prairie Mountain, there is no cell service in the canyon. You are on your own in an emergency situation if you don't have a satellite communication device.



The Upper Half of Prairie Dog Canyon

# HAVE FUN, PLAY SAFE AND ENJOY YOUR VISIT TO PRAIRIE DOG CANYON!



Rappel #2