

McCrystal Homestead Trail

Valle Vidal Unit – Carson National Forest

Distance from Casa del Gavilan to trail head:

50 miles – 75-90 minutes

Trail length: 3 ½ miles each way. Total 7 miles

Elevation gain: 500 feet

Difficulty: Easy, but long distance

Points of interest: Much of trail along stream.

Scattered ruins and foundations along route. McCrystal Homestead ruins.

No passes or fees are required in Valle Vidal



For those looking for a trail a bit more adventurous than Cimarron Canyon State Park, the trail to the

McCrystal Homestead offers a long, but fairly easy trail to the ruins of the McCrystal homestead. Take along a picnic lunch and use the sandstone ledges behind the homestead for a memorable picnic with a beautiful view stretching to the south of the homestead.

The east side of Valle Vidal is typically closed from January 1 through March 31. During this time, the gravel road through Valle Vidal is open but no hiking or other activities off the main road are permitted, which includes this hike. During winter months, snow can block the road in places. Be cautious of driving into Valle Vidal during or after heavy rains or in winter weather. Cell phones will only work for a mile or two off Highway 64. The rest of the time you'll be out of cell phone range and "on your own". Traffic along the road can be very sparse except for summer months and hunting season. Make certain you have a spare tire as flat tires do sometimes occur on the gravel road.

To reach the trailhead, drive north out of Cimarron on Highway 64 (toward Raton) five miles. On the right (east) side of the road, you'll see a sign "Valle Vidal Unit Carson National Forest" pointing to the left (west). Turn west onto the gravel road. This part of the road passes through Ted Turner's nearly 600,000-acre Vermejo Park Ranch which runs into Colorado. You will see gated side roads for numerous gas wells along the main road. The road is a public highway but no hiking or other activities are permitted off the gravel road. Twenty-one miles from Highway 64 a sign marks the entrance into Valle Vidal. Beyond this point, hiking and other off-road activities are permitted with some restrictions. Proceed another 8 miles to the McCrystal campground on the right side of the road. The elevation at the campground is 8,100 feet. Well-maintained pit toilets are available in the McCrystal Campground.

Immediately past the campground on the right side is a small road which usually has a "Road Closed" gate on it. This gate is located at mile marker 25.2. Mile Markers are only on the south side of the road, only at each mile, and only face west. Park on either side of the main road or in the McCrystal Campground. If you park in the campground entrance, walk back out to the main road and follow it just past the campground to the small road on the right. If you instead cut through the campground, you'll have to climb over a barbed-wire fence on the far end.

The "Road Closed" sign is only meant for vehicles, not hikers. Walk around the gate and follow the old two-track road north along the edge of the campground and beyond. The old road is easy to follow. There are a few areas where the road splinters but all routes come back together after a short distance. The old road climbs evenly through the sparse forest and meadows about 500 feet to the McCrystal homestead but over the 3½ mile route the elevation change is hardly noticeable at about ¾ of an inch per step. The trail is very easy to follow. The only place where you'll want to be careful is near the cabin the road takes a hard right-hand turn and crosses the creek at damaged culverts. Where the road turns right, vehicle tracks continue north and may lead the unwitting hiker in the wrong direction. From this turn, the ruins is about half a mile and at an elevation of 8,600 feet. Return to the McCrystal Campground and your vehicle along the same route.

If you want to explore a bit further, the road continues another mile or so north to the edge of Valle Vidal to the Vermejo Park Ranch boundary. If you have a bit of energy left when you return to your car, take the "Ring Place Interpretive Trail" that begins at a large sign at the entrance to the McCrystal Campground. This trail is about a mile long and goes to the old Ring homestead on the south side of the road. Signs and photographs at various locations around the homestead describe the life of the Ring family and their history during the logging days in what is now Valle Vidal.

For more information: https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd593220.pdf

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/carson/recreation/horseriding-camping/recarea/?recid=44224&actid=104>

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