

La Belle, New Mexico Townsite

Valle Vidal Unit – Carson National Forest

Distance from Casa del Gavilan to trail head:
63 miles – 90-120 minutes

Trail length: 2 miles each way

Elevation climb: 500 feet

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Points of interest: Townsite of La Belle, New Mexico. None of the town remains. Mining works scattered throughout the nearby valley.

No passes or fees are required in Valle Vidal

Gold and other valuable minerals were discovered in the area after the Civil War but settlement of the area took another few decades. It was named in the summer of 1894 after Belle Dixon, the wife of a prospector who was one of the first investors in the area. La Belle boasted 80 buildings including three saloons, three hotels, a restaurant, a mercantile store, newspaper, stage stop, butcher, blacksmith, and feed shops. The Southern Hotel was a 4-story, 80-room structure dismantled and moved to La Belle from Catskill, New Mexico, 30 miles northeast.

From: <http://ghosttowns.placesandpics.com/new-mexico/labelle-nm/>
Located in the Keystone Mining District, LaBelle was once home to 600 or more people, most of them gold miners. Historic records indicate that LaBelle's post office operated from 1895-1901. Additionally, the town had stores, saloons, hotels, and a newspaper (the LaBelle Cresset, 1894-1898). Some miners continued living and working in LaBelle as late as 1910.

Few people have heard of LaBelle, New Mexico, and it doesn't appear in any of the usual "Ghost Town" reference books. It's no wonder because there's practically nothing left of the town. The town doesn't appear on any modern maps, there are no Forest Service signs, and few people explore beyond the nearest access road that is two miles away. Even the name of LaBelle Creek has been changed.

The only hint at the true location of LaBelle is "LaBelle Lodge" that appears on some maps. La Belle Lodge is much newer than the historic town. Evidence indicates it was added on and remodeled perhaps as recently as the 1980, but the original construction is older, 1950s or 1960s. Scattered throughout the forest nearby are hundreds of mining shafts, small prospect pits, and evidence of placer mining in the valley bottoms. One group of rocks not far from the Lodge is likely a chimney fall, marking the location of a historic house or cabin.

The east side of Valle Vidal is typically closed for elk and deer calving from January 1 through March 31 and the west side (including this area) from May 1 through June 30. 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) for 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 20 miles to Mile Marker (?). Make a hard left onto the small dirt road along Comanche Creek. A third of a mile down this road is a parking area. Follow the trail two miles to the southwest. The La Belle townsite was around the cabin with the red roof. It is highly recommended you not enter this building as it could prove dangerous. Don't begin the hike if the weather is threatening. The elevation here is nearly 10,000 feet. With little cover between the parking area and the townsite, lightning can be a significant hazard should a sudden storm blow in as is common during the summer months.



La Belle, New Mexico Summer 1897

La Belle NM Trail

