

Ring Homestead and Townsite, Seally Canyon, Ponil Park Townsite Valle Vidal Unit – Carson National Forest

Distance from Casa del Gavilan to trail head:

50 miles – 75-90 minutes

Trail length: 10 ½ miles loop trail

Elevation change: 550 feet

Difficulty: Easy, but long

Points of interest: Ring Homestead, Ring Townsite, Ring Cemetery, Seally Canyon along

The Rock Wall, Ponil Park Townsite and Cemetery



When logging began in earnest in the Cimarron area, Ring and Ponil Park was two of several townsites that sprang up in the vast sea of timber in the mountains to the northwest of the town. Ring, Ponil Park, and other towns housed hundreds of loggers while the timber lasted. When the endless supply of trees ended, the loggers pulled up the tracks as they departed leaving scant evidence of their presence other than stumps as far as the eye could see. Only the grass was left to whisper in the wind.

The stumps, as well as other evidence of the massive logging from over a century ago, have disappeared from the Valle Vidal. What remains of these towns are a few old cabins, some of the machinery used to cut and haul the logs and lumber, and cemeteries of the loved ones they left behind. At the Ring Townsite the smokestacks of the mill lay on the ground where the mill once stood. The Ring cemetery contains a number of markers, most of them weathered far beyond recognition. The only remains of both townsites are a few ruined cabins, and bits of machinery scattered around the area.

The east side of Valle Vidal is typically closed between January 1st 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 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. Park in the campground, or along the north (right) side of the road. Well maintained pit toilets are available in the McCrystal Campground.

Just inside the entrance to the campground is a sign for the "Ring Place Interpretive Trail". Follow this trail to the Ring Homestead to get started on this trek. Circle the homestead and read the informational panels about the history of the Ring Family. From the homestead follow the dirt road west, then south. The rest of the route is easy to follow along well-worn two-track roads. Philmont Scout Ranch staffs the Ring Homestead, as well as Ponil Park and a few other areas in the Valle Vidal, during the summer months. So don't be surprised if you see crews of Scouts hiking this route in the summer. The Philmont staff is happy to answer questions about the Ring Homestead and the history of the area from non-Scout visitors.

The hike to the Ring and Ponil Park townsites is a pleasant, but long, stroll into the backcountry of Valle Vidal. The hike will four hours or so. While the elevation change is 500 feet, the grades are gentle so the rise and fall is hardly noticeable. The roads will take you to the townsite of Ring, south of The Rock Wall, then along The Rock Wall through Seally Canyon to the Ponil Park townsite. North of Ponil Park the road passes through fields of distinctive orange and yellow sandstone from the Poison Canyon formation formed 60 million years ago when this area was at sea level on the shore of the Western Interior Seaway that covered much of what is now the Great Plains. When you reach the junction of Seally and Ponil Canyons, the Ponil Park cemetery is on the south side of the canyon. The roadbed for the railroad that once ran all the way to Cimarron can still be seen winding through the canyon. Evidence of long-ago forest fires can be seen on the ridges of Ponil Canyon. While there isn't enough left of either Ring or Ponil Park for them to be called a ghost towns, evidence of the people that lived and worked in this remote setting a century ago makes for interesting exploring in the valley and along the hillsides.

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

Ring Seally Canyon Ponil Park

