

Valle Vidal Road Tour

The Valle Vidal unit of Carson National Forest from Cimarron to Costilla

Total Distance: 46 miles

Estimated duration: ~3-8 hours, depending on length of stops

Route: From Cimarron, east on Hwy 64, through the Valle Vidal, west to Costilla via Forested Road 1950

(Visitors should be aware that most open roads within the unit are not surfaced and may become very slippery and impassable for 2-wheel drive vehicles during wet weather. Snow makes these roads impassable to all wheeled vehicles from around mid-December to the latter part of April.)

PLEASE BE MINDFUL THAT THERE IS NO CELL SERVICE THROUGHOUT VALLE VIDAL.

Rules & Regulations:

Closed during elk-calving season:

Spring- west side of Valle Vidal is closed from May 1-June 30

Winter- east side of Valle Vidal is closed from Jan 1-March 31

Fishing: Specific lures & baits are required; catch and release only

Exception: Shuree Ponds— up to 2 trout take-home.

One of these ponds is reserved for anglers under age 12.

Hunting: Elk hunting by lottery only.

For more information on hunting and fishing,

contact the New Mexico Department of Game & Fish: 505-467-8000

The Valle Vidal, which means Valley of Life in Spanish, is full of wildlife, including mule deer, black bear, mountain lion, bald eagles, and native Rio Grande cutthroat trout. It also boasts the largest herd of elk in New Mexico (about 2,000 elk). The Valle Vidal comprises about 102,000 acres and is a great place for fishing, hiking, picnicking, camping, wildlife viewing, etc.

From Cimarron, take Hwy 64 east toward Raton. Five miles outside of Cimarron, turn left onto Forested Road 1950. There is a sign indicating the road to Valle Vidal. This is a well-maintained, dirt road and is suitable for 2WD vehicles. Travel 20 miles west through Vermejo Park Ranch, a 500,000 acre ranch owned by Ted Turner. (Public access is permitted to drive through it.) Upon crossing the cattle guard you are leaving Vermejo Park and entering Carson National Forest. The signage there lists the rules and regulations of the Forest.

Seven miles from the cattle guard is a **bike trail**. There is a spot for parking on the right. One mile further (*that's 8 miles from the cattle guard and 28 miles from Hwy 64*) is **McCrystal Campground**. The campground has primitive sites with fire pits w/grates, horse stalls, vault toilets, & a water spigot. A Day Use fee applies. There is a self-guided tour to a pioneer cabin across the road from the entrance to McCrystal Campground.

From McCrystal Campground to the west, the main road crosses over a feature called **The Rock Wall**, and climbs into the western part of the Valle Vidal. There is an overlook at the last switchback from which you can see far out over eastern New Mexico. The distant dark mountain on the horizon to the northeast is near Trinidad Colorado. The road climbs by way of a number of switchbacks until you come to Shuree Ponds.

Traveling 8 miles from McCrystal Campground (*that's 16 miles from the cattle guard or 36 miles from Hwy 64*) you will see the **Shuree Ponds** on your left, as well as the Shuree Lodge buildings. There is a short access road to get to them. This is a great place to stop for a picnic, take a walk or a hike, or just view the wildflow-

ers, meadows, mountains, & forests. Tables and restrooms are available. The Ponds are stocked with trout and are a good place to fish.

Two miles up from Shuree Ponds is **Cimarron Campground** (*that's 18 miles from the cattle guard or 38 miles from Hwy 64*). It sits about 1/4 mile off the main road, on the Loop Road, to your left. The Loop Road past Cimarron Campground may not be passable during/after inclement weather, so be sure to call the USFS before traversing it. The Loop Road eventually intersects with the main road near McCrystal Campground. The facilities at Cimarron Campground are the same as McCrystal Campground and also requires a day use fee.

Continuing on from Cimarron Campground, you will continue climbing until you reach the highest points of the road. You will eventually reach a parking area and overlook where there is a large wooden corral on the left. Looking southward from there, you can see the headwaters of Comanche Creek, for which Comanche Point was named. Far to the southeast, you can see the northeast side of **Wheeler Peak**, the highest point in New Mexico at 13,161 feet.

Continuing on the main road heading west along the Comanche Creek, you will pass wide meadows and forested mountains to the south as the road begins to descend. There are good places to stop and enjoy the views or take a walk along this road.

Continue on the main road, following the Comanche Creek until you cross the river. Here you will come to the confluence of the Comanche Creek and Rio Costilla. Between them to the east is a massive rock formation known as **Comanche Point**. The road to your right follows Rio Costilla for a couple miles until it ends at a parking area in a beautiful valley. The dam to the northeast of the parking lot holds **Costilla Reservoir** and marks the northern boundary of the Valle Vidal. Take the drive up to the parking area where you can see the dam and take in beautiful views of the Rio Costilla Valley. Then turn around and head back to Comanche Point.

Continue heading east on the main road and very shortly you will come to the east entrance to the Valle Vidal. The town of Amalia sits just east of the entrance. Continue on to Costilla, then south on Hwy 522 to Questa (about 25 miles from Amalia to Questa). From there, continue south to Taos or east to Red River and then back to Cimarron.

*As a small sample of the flora, try hunting along marshy areas that grade into dry grassy slopes to find penstemons (*Penstemon* spp.), paintbrush (*Castilleja* spp.), cinquefoils (*Potentilla* spp.), harebells (*Campanula rotundifolia*), skyrocket (*Ipomopsis aggregata*), purple geranium (*Geranium caespitosum*), and monument plant (*Frasera speciosa*). Look in boggy areas along streams to find gentians (*Gentiana* spp.), checkermallow (*Sidalcea* spp.), bog primrose (*Primula parryi*), shooting star (*Dodecatheon pulchellum*), and elephant-head lousewort (*Pedicularis groenlandica*).*

The best season for wildflower viewing is July and August when usually brief, but sometimes torrential, afternoon rains green-up the landscape. The Valle Vidal is in a remote, sparsely populated part of New Mexico, which results in low summertime visitation for such a beautiful area.

Excerpt taken from <http://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/regions/southwestern/ValleVidal/>

