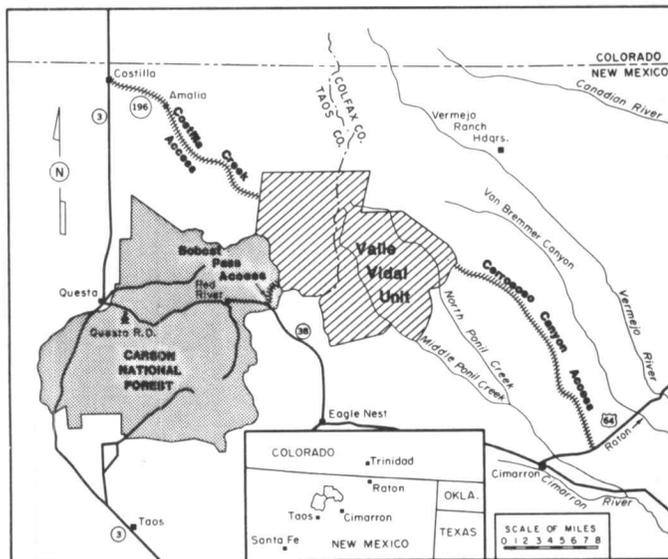


# Valle Vidal Opens to the Public

M.J. Hassell and Jack S. Crellin

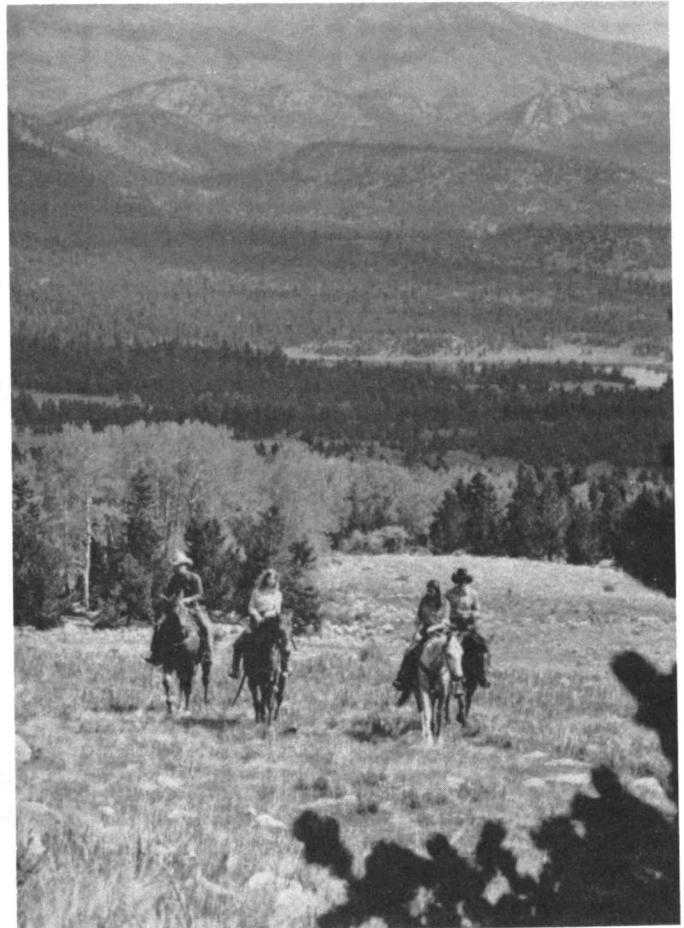
In the fall of 1984, the first public road into the Valle Vidal Unit of the Carson National Forest will be completed, opening a vast scenic area to outdoor recreationists. This area, the 100,000 acre western section of the half million acre Vermejo Ranch, was donated to the United States in January, 1982, and made a part of the Carson's Questa Ranger District. The donor was the Pennzoil Company of Houston, Texas, which owned and managed the area as a working cattle and guest range since 1973. At the time of donation, the largest in Forest Service history, Secretary of Agriculture, John Block said of the donation: "Pennzoil's generosity provides the public with an area of incredible beauty containing valuable natural resources".



**The Valle Vidal** and the Vermejo Ranch lie in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of New Mexico between Raton and Taos. The ranch was originally part of the two-million acre Maxwell Land Grant of 1841 which, through the years, was broken up into several ownerships. At the turn of the century, William H. Bartlett, a grain speculator and industrialist from Chicago, bought the part of the grant known as Vermejo Park. Bartlett and a partner acquired more land and invested in the development of fishing lakes. An elk herd was reestablished; and a school, fish hatchery, lodges for guests, and a power generating plant were built.

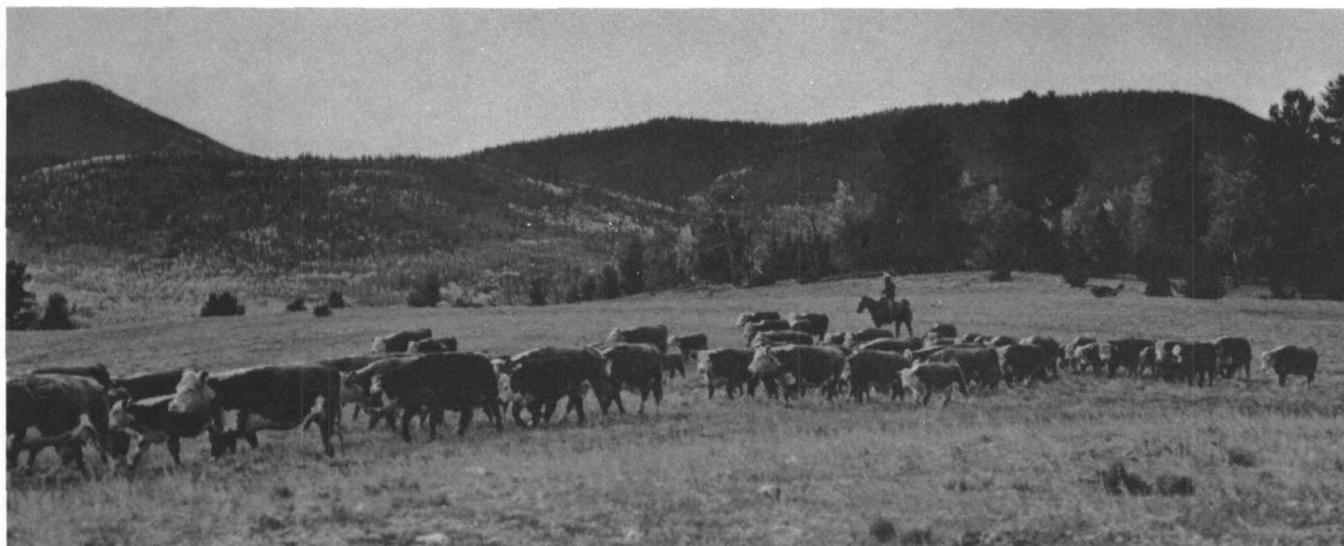
In 1926, Vermejo Park was sold to Harrison Chandler of the

*Los Angeles Times-Mirror* Corporation, who organized the Vermejo Club with members drawn from the wealthiest circles of American society. The property changed owners again when W.J. Gourley of Fort Worth, Texas, began acquiring land in the Vermejo area in the 1940's. He built the ranch up to 479,000 acres. He also brought in more elk from Wyoming to improve hunting and introduced wild turkey and buffalo. After Gourley's death, the Vermejo was purchased by



Pennzoil in 1973 for approximately \$25 million. The federal government and the State of New Mexico were interested in the property at the time of sale but money for purchase was not available. Now, thanks to Pennzoil's generosity, at least part of the Vermejo belongs to the American people.

*Editor's Note:* Mr. Hassell is regional forester for the Southwestern Region of the Forest Service and Mr. Crellin is supervisor of the Carson National Forest.



**The huge addition** to the Carson National Forest brought with it responsibility and a mountain of work. What had been a private preserve where an elk hunting permit brought \$5,000 is now a multiple-use public property. While access is a major problem, the land managers of the Carson must also find and post boundaries, repair and maintain roads and trails, obliterate unneeded roads, and, in cooperation with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, decide how the rich wildlife resource will be managed. Decisions were made as to how many cattle the acreage will support, and who would get the permits.

Following environmental assessments for grazing and recreation management in 1983, a management plan and multiple use guides were developed that provided overall management direction for the protection, coordination, and development of resource activities in the area. The multiple-use guide provides for public access roads, a livestock grazing plan, and a recreational complex.

**Ten potential access routes** into the area were analyzed. Three were selected: Cerrososo Canyon, Costilla Creek, and Bobcat Pass-Van Diest Peak routes. All three routes cross private land and required easements before construction was possible. The Cerrososo route, along a right-of-way granted by the Vermejo Ranch as part of the donation, was the first constructed. This road, 25 miles of low standard, two-lane, winds through the canyon paralleling an older primitive

road. It was ready for hunters in September 1984. The second road was the Costilla Creek; and with the completion of the Bobcat Pass road, access into the area will be relatively easy from three directions.

Livestock grazing was evaluated under several management systems and stocking rates. Included were estimated use levels by elk and other wildlife. The selected alternative prescribes an initial stocking rate of 2,450 animal unit months or approximately 700 cows from, July 1 to October 15. The livestock will be grazed in a rotational pattern on 8 separate pastures.

**The selected recreational facilities** consist of two campgrounds, two picnic areas, and a roadside viewpoint. Parking areas are planned at strategic locations for fishing and back country access. Many existing roads will be converted to hiking trails. When the Valle Vidal Unit is fully open to the public, it will offer top recreational opportunities, including fishing and hunting.

In addition to the beauty of the setting, the donated land has important range, timber, mineral, and watershed values. The list of wildlife includes most of the major game and non-game species of the West. Through multiple use management, the Valle Vidal Unit is expected to benefit all classes of National Forest users, especially those who will ranch on the area or those whose businesses will directly benefit from increased public travel and visitation. ●

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