Nestled in a protected canyon in central Wyoming, South Pass City boomed with the discovery of gold in the late 1860s and became one of the busiest cities in the region as Wyoming Territory was carved out in 1868. Some 2,000 miners lived in rough housing within and near the city, hauled their gold to the assay office and spent it in the community's then thriving businesses. By 1872, work at the Clarissa Mine played out and most of the miners moved on, leaving behind the town they had created.

South Pass City
South Pass City's fate was to become a ghost; however, unlike many such boom towns, it would not fade into oblivion. It was here that Esther Hobart Morris encouraged territorial legislators to introduce a bill for women's suffrage; and here, too, she became the first female justice of the peace in the country. When the miners (and Morris) moved on, the city withered but did not melt back into the landscape. Eventually, the dilapidated buildings became the property of the state and have now been restored as South Pass City State Historic Site. You can pan for gold in Willow Creek, purchase goods at the Smith-Sherlock General Store and see artifacts and displays related to the South Pass gold mining era.

The ghosts of the Grand Encampment Copper District in Southern Wyoming were not so fortuitous. The discovery of copper and development of the Ferris-Haggarty copper mine in the Sierra Madre in 1897 gave rise to several mining towns: Elwood, located just west of Grand Encampment; Battle, atop the Continental Divide; Rambler, overlooking Battle Lake; Copperton, along Haggarty Creek where it crosses Highway 70; and Dillon, named for saloon keeper Malachi Dillon, established a mile from the Ferris-Haggarty mine when its owners refused to allow liquor to be served there.

When the Civilian Conservation Corps built the first highway (now Wyoming Highway 70) over Battle Pass in the 1930s, they removed most of the buildings from the town of Battle. Some were taken to nearby Encampment, and one is now relocated to the Grand Encampment Museum where it is operated as the Battle Miner newspaper office.

For the most part, Dillon's log cabins have fallen to disrepair and the seasons, but at the ghost town site, you will see some of the deteriorating logs and can identify places where others were positioned. You can learn more about these ghost towns at the Grand Encampment Museum, which has its own recreated town, formed with historic structures moved from throughout the valley.

Although you can't technically call Point of Rocks Stage Station in southwest Wyoming a ghost town, for it never really was a town, you can certainly agree that as the only station remaining
intact on the Overland Trail, it is a ghost of the past. Located just south of Interstate 80 at Point of Rocks (you can get directions at the store or restaurant), the stage station is fully intact. Park your vehicle to explore the building and then walk west on the Overland Trail. Less than a quarter mile to the west, you will find some fenced gravesites that date back to the 19th century.

There are remnants of other stage stations all along the Overland Trail, but most are difficult to reach or virtually impossible to find unless you are with someone who knows the way. There aren't any "road signs" pointing the way. One exception is the Big Bend Stage Station at Granger, which was a way point on the Oregon Trail. Like Point of Rocks, the building is still standing, and you can view the exterior. It is on the west side of town, just south of Granger's bar and restaurant.

There are ghost towns near Meeteetse as well, including Kirwin, situated along the Wood River west of town on U.S. Forest Service land. The town once had 38 buildings and around 200 residents during its gold and silver boom heyday in the 1890s. The town began to deteriorate after a massive snowstorm in 1907 piled up quickly, causing an avalanche that killed three people. When the residents dug out, most of them left, never to return. In the 1930s, the land became part of the Double D Dude Ranch, a place visited by Amelia Earhart and her husband George Putnam. A cabin was being constructed for Earhart when she disappeared during an around-the-world flight in 1937; it was never completed, but the remains are still visible about a mile from Kirwin.

Today the land at Kirwin is owned by the U.S. Forest Service, where stabilization and restoration of the extant buildings has been undertaken. Access to the land is limited to summer months and requires a four-wheel drive vehicle. The Meeteetse Museum occasionally conducts tours to Kirwin and Arland, another nearby ghost town located on private property. You can learn more about both ghost towns at the museum.