

THE KIDS TAKE THE KEYS

Family-pleasing day trips

**"I believe there's
a Skittles factory
at the top."**

Where would your kids go if you gave them the keys to the car? What would they do if they were in charge for the day? My assignment seemed simple enough: Relinquish control, and let the kids plan a day of fun within a short drive of Smugglers' Notch. I figured the simplest way to find out was to ask one of them. So, I put the question to my nine-year-old daughter while lying in bed one night. Rather than pondering the countless options her newly found power presented, she answered me in two seconds flat. "I don't exactly know how to drive there, but I'd go to Essex Cinemas and watch movies all day."

Honest, but not exactly the answer I was hoping for. It's tough to build a Vermont vacation article around a day-long trip to the movie theater. I decided a little prompting was in order. "What about the recreation path in Stowe?"

"Yeah, yeah! I love that!" I thought I had her hooked, so I decided to dig a little deeper. "There's that great farmer's market right next to the path on Sundays..." She frowned and wrinkled her brow. "But, that's adult fun — not kid fun." I reminded her of the cool needle felting she did at one booth and of all the tasty samples she ate while walking around. "Yeah ... I guess," she half-heartedly humored me. I realized that this could be more complicated than I had originally anticipated.

Turning the car keys over to the kids for a day would most definitely yield a day of youthful nirvana, but, honestly, do you want to spend a beautiful summer day at the movie theater or in an arcade? The trick is to find kid-friendly activities that have some parental appeal. Then, in theory, everyone will be happy.

Vermont is full of family-friendly attractions, designed to entertain young and old alike. You could spend hours visiting ECHO Lake Aquarium in Burlington, the Shelburne Museum, Shelburne Farms or the Vermont Teddy Bear Factory in Shelburne. But what if you want to live like a local? If you have a few free hours or a full day to fill, here are some of our kid-approved (and parent friendly) favorites.

Starting close to home, head up through Smugglers' Notch for a little spelunking in the kid-friendly caves at the top of Route 108. Bask in the sun on the large boulders. Enjoy a picnic lunch and gawk at the rock climbers high above. If you have an energetic bunch (or an adult need for a little more activity), cross the street to the Sterling Pond Trail, and enjoy an easy 1.2 mile hike to the summit where you'll be greeted by mountain views and a sparkling pond. If you have reluctant hikers, try the mom-tested "I believe there's a Skittles factory at the top" method (and be prepared to come through with the goods).

If you're seeking other active alternatives, continue over the Notch to Stowe, where you'll find the recreation path — great for running, biking, scootering and inline skating. Your best bet is to park behind the Community Church on Main Street and begin your adventure going up the ever-so-slightly inclined 5.5 mile path. This way when the whining begins (you know it's inevitable), the descent will be speedy and effortless. On a hot day, take a dip in the crystal clear water of the West Branch River that meanders along the path. The Depot Street Malt Shop in the village of Stowe offers a perfect post-adventure ice cream treat, so everyone leaves with good vibes.

If eating sounds like a better option than exercising, leave Stowe on Route 100 headed toward Waterbury. Once you get to Waterbury Center, let the tasting begin. First stop at the Cold Hollow Cider Mill to sample fresh cider as you watch them press apples. Adults can sample Vermont Country Wine from the Grand View Winery here too. Work off a few

by Jennifer Borch

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calories with a quick dip in the Waterbury Reservoir, hidden just to the right off Route 100 after you leave the Cold Hollow Cider Mill. Then continue south to the Cabot Cheese Annex Store and Lake Champlain Chocolates. Stuff yourselves with cheese and chocolate before waddling down the road to the Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream Factory for a tour and sample of Vermont's Finest. If you visit early in the evening, you'll find shorter wait times for the tour and, if you're lucky, you may even catch the Ben & Jerry's Movie Festival — a free, outdoor movie playing at dusk on Saturdays.

If you are inclined to head for the lake instead of the mountains, drive west to Burlington where a few hours spent on Church Street can be both kid and parent friendly. While you window shop, the kids can splash in the fountain on the top block. The street is teeming with vendors offering tasty treats for every palate. Once you arrive at lower Church Street, you can scoot around behind City Hall for a quick romp in the park and splash in another fountain to keep everyone cool and happy.

Next head to Battery Park, overlooking Lake Champlain at the north end of Battery Street. Here, in addition to breathtaking views of the lake, you'll find a great playground for the kids and Beansies — Burlington's iconic hotdog and creemee bus. The fries are not to be missed, but pay attention to the sea gulls. They're practiced food thieves and have been known to fly off with entire meals. Battery Park is also the site of Burlington's "Music in the Park" summer concert

series. Bring a blanket and enjoy free music in a beautiful setting while the kids play nearby.

Once you finally make your way down to the lake, your options are numerous. Just hang out on the rocks and feed the ducks. Sit on the dock at the boathouse and dangle your feet in the water. Rent a boat for a few hours or cruise the lake on the Spirit of Ethan Allen. Follow the bike path to North Beach for sandy summer fun, or take the bike path south to Oakledge Park where you'll find a rocky swimming cove and a grassy playground overlooking the lake. Both beaches are an easy and flat ride — less than two miles from Waterfront Park — long enough to qualify as an adventure, but short enough to keep the complaints from ruining the ride.

Finally, for an actual taste of local life, check out one of the area's many farmers' markets. In addition to fresh, local produce, they often feature live music and crafts in kid-friendly locations. Or, if you'd rather harvest your own local produce, try berry picking at one of the many "pick-your-own" sites. In late July and August, the Owl's Head Blueberry Farm in Richmond offers music while you pick.

Outdoor evening concerts in and around Chittenden County also provide a great opportunity for some open-air, economical fun. Bring a picnic dinner, a blanket and some bug spray and settle in for a few hours (or minutes, depending on your crew) of local entertainment.

In general, we have found that water, playgrounds, snacks and music are a

recipe for success on family outings. If we can squeeze in a little exercise, shopping and site-seeing, it's a bonus. Keeping everyone happy is truly a balancing act. I'm not ready to toss the keys to the kids just yet, but I have realized that family harmony is directly related to how often we let them steer.

Jennifer Borch lives in Jericho, Vermont and writes a column chronicling the adventures of motherhood for the Burlington Free Press. She frequently explores the North Country with her three kids and husband in tow. You can visit her blog at: www.burlingtonmomslikeme.com



FAVORITE FAMILY CAR GAMES

My kids prefer **Sibling War Games**. I like "Let's see who can be quiet the longest." Once a year we do find car harmony when the local radio station starts playing holiday carols 24/7. We all try to guess which song will come on next. Winner gets a dollar if they guess. It usually costs me about \$10 in December, but they keep their eyes on the prize and stop bugging each other and me for twenty-five days.

On December 26th we go back to **Sibling War Games**.

Uh, maybe you were looking for something like the **License Plate Game**?

– Jennifer Borch

— Have a nice day! —

Farmers' Markets

Johnson Farmers Market,
Tuesdays 3-6 pm

Burlington Farmers' Market • City Hall Park,
www.burlingtonfarmersmarket.org

Richmond Farmers' Market • Volunteers Green,
Richmond, 434-5273
Fridays, 3-6:30 pm

Waterbury Farmers' Market
Rusty Parker Memorial Park, Waterbury,
www.rotary-waterbury.org
Thursdays, 3-7 pm

More farmers' market information at
www.vermontagriculture.com

Lake Champlain

Lake Champlain Community Sailing Center
Waterfront Park, Burlington, 864-2499,
www.communitysailingcenter.org

Spirit of Ethan Allen
Waterfront Park, Burlington, 862-8300,
www.soea.com

Local Music & Entertainment

Ben & Jerry's Movie Festival
Tuesday nights at Church Street, Burlington
Saturday nights at the Waterbury factory,
Route 100, Waterbury
Runs for 8 weeks beginning July 4th

Burlington's Music in the Park Concert Series
Battery Park, Burlington, 865-7166
www.burlingtoncityarts.com
Friday, July 3rd; Thursday, July 16th; Thursday,
July 23rd; Thursday, July 30th
Saturdays, 8:30 am – 2:30 pm

South Burlington Summer Music Series
Dorset Park, South Burlington, 846-4108
Thursdays, 6:30 pm, June 25th – July 30th

Thursdays at the Intervale – music, food and
kids' activities • Calkins Community Barn, 180
Intervale Road, Burlington, 660-0440, www.intervale.org

Waterbury Rotary Music Nights with Ben &
Jerry's Ice Cream • Rusty Parker Memorial Park,
Waterbury • www.waterburyvt.com
Thursdays, 6:30 pm, June 18th – August 20th

Williston's Groovin' at the Green
Maple Tree Place, Williston, 646-5263
Thursdays, 6-8 pm, June 18th – August 20th

Pick-Your-Own Berries

Owl's Head Farm - blueberry picking and
music in late July and early August
263 Blueberry Farm Road, Richmond,
434-3387

More pick-your-own information at
www.pickyourown.org