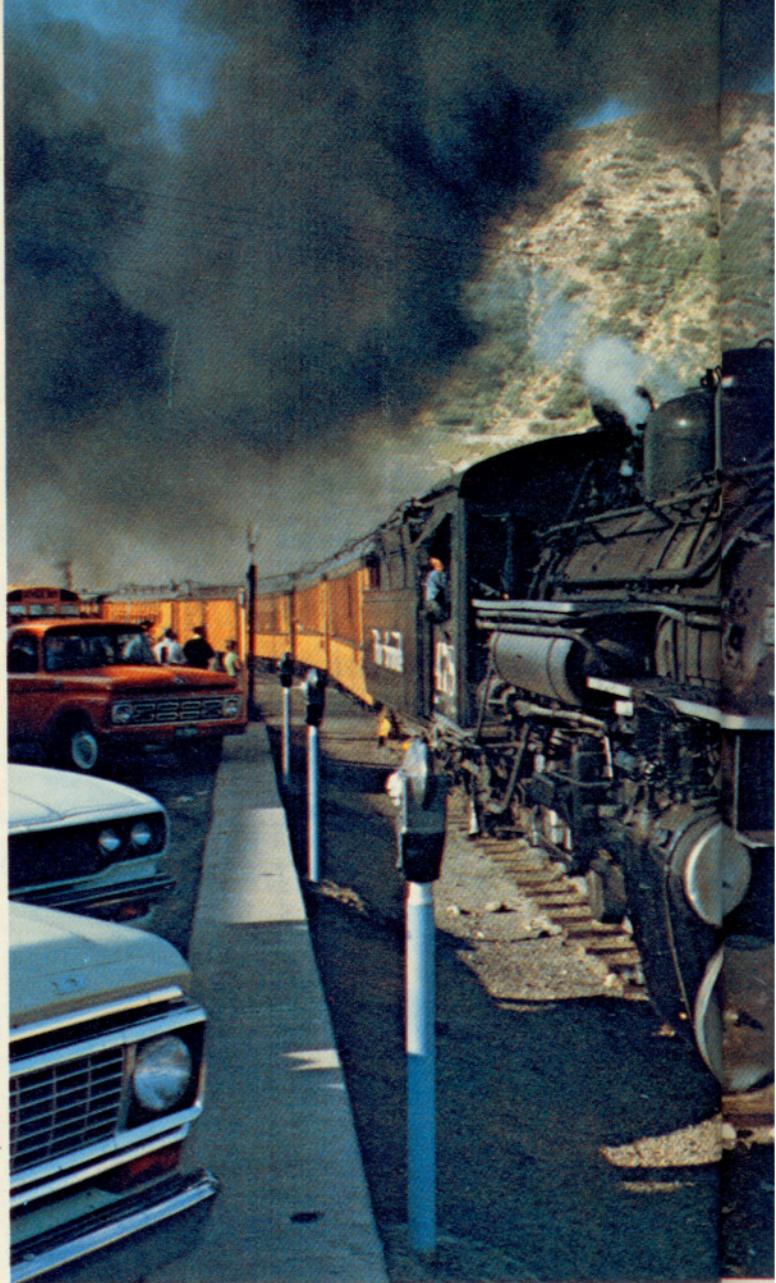




Making each stop an event is the author's recipe for comfortable traveling with a family. Here, the boys do some rock climbing at an overlook near Estes Park, Colo. Photos by the author.



Know When To Stop

Keeping a young family happy when traveling in a lightplane

by ANNE S. MOORE

■ ■ One secret of success in family flying is knowing when—and where—to stop. In our case, a family flying trip works just right only if we have planned in advance with certain considerations in mind.

We have found, for example, that our boys enjoy flying mostly as a means to an end, which is getting where they want to go. To keep them happy we have learned to use lunchtime and overnight stops creatively so that they contribute to the total enjoyment of the trip. On a trip out West last summer, we found that stopping in the right places made the vacation much more stimulating for us all.

Our overall plan was to spend a week on a ranch in Colorado, fly southwest to visit Durango and Mesa Verde, and then go north again to Jackson Hole for another week. It was on a very hot and humid Boston summer day that we packed Chris (12), Brian (8), and Danny (7) into our Cessna 340 and headed for the Rocky Mountain states.

We planned on St. Louis for our first overnight stop, one day west of Boston and a great “kid city”—small enough to get around in easily and providing plenty of variety. We landed at Weiss Airport southwest of the city and conveniently near the home of relatives.



From Durango to Silverton the 3½-hour ride on the Denver and Rio Grand, with refreshments, was a welcome change for the youngsters.

The Gateway to the West is identified by the huge stainless steel Gateway Arch, Eero Saarinen's monument to the city's pioneers, which stands tall on the riverfront. On a clear day it is a must to ride to the top in unique ferris-wheel capsules for a 30-mile view to the east and west.

Westward across the city is Forest Park which houses many attractions, but none so popular as the famous St. Louis Zoo, which is one of the first in the country to have demonstrated its respect for the animals by use of a clean, natural setting. The zoo train whisks visitors from one section to another, including stops at elephant, seal, and monkey shows, but the new Cat Country and bear dens are shows in themselves.

Just a few hours after the zoo closes, Forest Park presents other spectaculars in summer months—the St. Louis Municipal Opera's evening program of operettas and musicals and, on certain evenings, the planetarium programs of star and sky watching.

It is well worth the time to stop at Grant's Farm to see the Clydesdale horses at the Anheuser-Busch stables. Named for Ulysses S. Grant, whose log cabin still stands on this land which once was his farm, the park offers so much more than we expected—a 21-acre preserve for deer, elk and

buffalo; a miniature zoo featuring young animals that the children can feed and pet; and a delightful bird show starring macaws and cockatoos.

Our destination the next day was the ranch in Colorado. Searching the chart for a lunch stop, we came across Dodge City, Kan., and decided a slight detour to the south might well be worth it, which it was. The boys knew they'd arrived in the West on landing at Dodge. Competing FBOs often have shown us colorful welcomes, but the Four Sons at Dodge outdid them all with a rootin'-tootin' cowgirl (their sister) in fringed mini-outfit waving us toward their pumps with her six-shooters.

After losing her guns to Brian and Danny the cowgirl advised us to drive in the courtesy car downtown to Boot Hill and Front Street, where the era of Matt Dillon and others has been preserved in a block of rustic shops, including the famous Long Branch Saloon and a delightful cafeteria featuring menu selections named for the Gunsmoke folks. After visiting Boot Hill "where they buried 'em with their boots on," we agreed that this had been a super stop and headed for the airport and the afternoon leg to Colorado.

Watching the Rockies come up to meet you is awesome even in a large jet, though quickly past, but in a private aircraft you can absorb the spectacle as it comes, go face to face with Pikes Peak in Colorado Springs, and then turn north and shadow the easternmost ridge to your full enjoyment. We did just this, reaching Fort Collins-Loveland Airport with the sun setting low over the peaks.

Our airplane was bedded down for a week, and in an overloaded rental car we drove west through the Big Thompson Canyon—ravaged by floods just a year before—through Estes Park, and southward to the Double JK Ranch in the shadow of Longs Peak. Ranch life is tailor-made for boys, and the week we spent there is easily one of the most successful family vacations we've had.

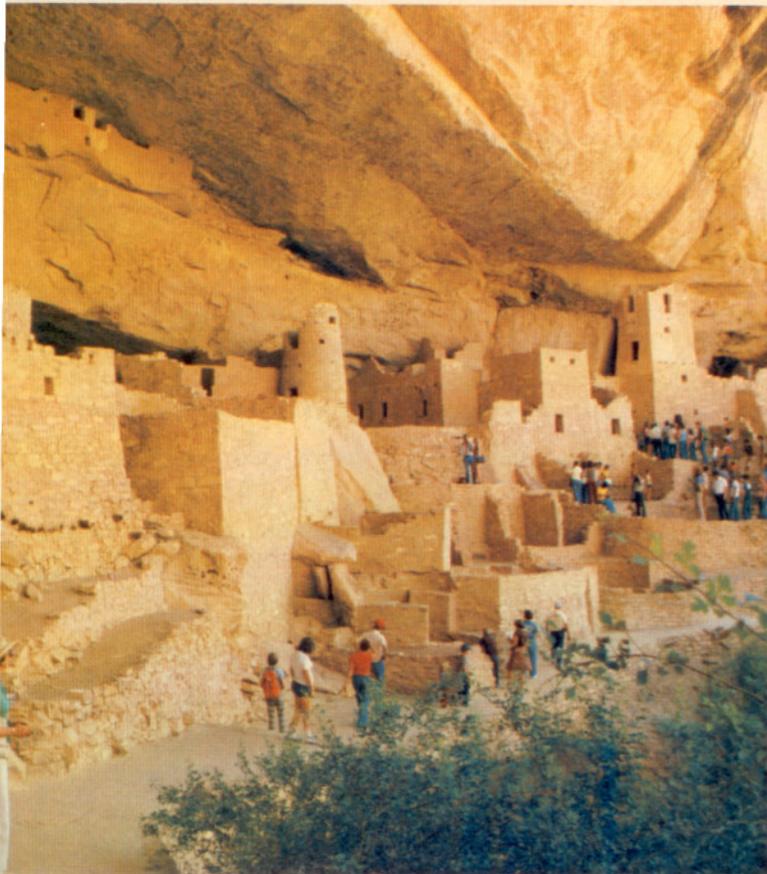
Very regretfully we left after the week to continue the trip to Durango in the Four Corners area of Colorado. We had planned to stop for lunch at Leadville (whose Lake Co. Airport is the highest in North America at 9,927 feet), and very luckily landed just before the "World's Highest Airshow" was about to begin. This special event and fly-in is a three-day spectacle, with parachute jumpers, professional aerobatics, and air rides. In town, Boom Days take up with parades, dances, mining and drilling contests, innumerable shows and a motorcycle Gran Prix.

In about three hours we saw the airshow featuring Mike Ryer in his Pitts Special, Ron Webster of Cho Ron Airshows, and drove into town for a quick round of whatever was going on.

Once the airshow was over 60DM was the first departure, and we enjoyed a beautiful flight over the San Juan mountains to Durango's Animas Airpark. Owned and managed by Bonnie and Jim Gregg, it is a most hospitable and friendly field. For our boys Animas is memorable for its two hangar cats whose names are call numbers and who were just as friendly as their owners. The airport is only a few minutes away from Durango where we found another festival, Navajo Trail Days, going full blast with rodeos, parades and, of course, rides on the Silverton Railroad.

Because of the length of the train ride from Durango to Silverton (3½ hours), and the lure of a scenic drive over the same route, we decided to split up. No one was disappointed, we who photographed the locomotive's dramatic departure with steam hissing and whistles blasting, nor the boys who reported a spectacular train ride complete with refreshments. Our drive was a lovely private tour over some of the most spectacular high land in Colorado, featuring Molas Lake just below Molas Pass and the Trinity Peaks.

Silverton is strictly for fun and cameras—old storefronts and Old West atmosphere. After lunch and a game of pool in one of the saloons, we headed north on the dramatic road to Ouray, the "Switzerland of America." The boys en-



One day was spent hiking at Mesa Verde National Park, where the cliff dwellings gave a glimpse of life in America over 600 years ago.

KNOW WHEN TO STOP *continued*

joyed seeing both working and abandoned mines and picked up lots of "gold" rocks. Claims are still being made in precious ores, and this activity along with the extraordinary natural beauty makes the region rich indeed.

We spent another day in Durango in order to visit Mesa Verde National Park. From the extremely primitive mesa-top pithouses to the Pueblo villages, and ultimately the cliff dwellings of these ancient Americans, the tour is fascinating and awesome. As we climbed among the ruins we seemed to intrude on a spirit from an era which has retained its mystery for more than 600 years. Mesa Verde required a full day to absorb its history and variety and to explore the various exhibits.

Promising ourselves a return to the Four Corners area, we turned north to Jackson Hole, Wyo. We could have flown nonstop from Durango but, following our policy of keeping the troops interested, we landed for lunch at Vernal, Ut., a large field in a natural bowl set into the arid plains near the Utah-Colorado border. Straddling this border is Dinosaur National Monument, which sounded intriguing.

The hospitable FBO provided directions to hamburger stands and a courtesy car for the one-half hour ride to Dinosaur. It turned out to be a real hit. A unique living monument has been created in a shelter over the actual quarry where dinosaur bones are being uncovered and, instead of being removed and reconstructed as in numerous museums, are retained in their sandstone beds in a bas-relief exhibit.

We had to tear the boys away in order to get going, but on the way to the airport stopped for some ice cream at a restaurant and gift shop. There we learned that wooden Indians can talk, as the one on the front porch begged Chris for a bite of his ice cream cone. We never did solve the mystery, and voted the Vernal area another super stop as we took off once again for Wyoming.

The Jackson Hole Airport offers more of the friendly Western hospitality we'd come to expect. After looking into various accommodations we rented a comfortable, modern condominium in Teton Village. The competition among hotels, clubs and condominium developments for summer clients, as the region grows into a four-season resort, makes it most attractive for a family—and our condominium at roughly \$40 per day was a real bargain. It suited us perfectly as a convenient base for riding, hiking, fishing and enjoying the natural wonders of the national parks, among which the Tetons get top billing.

A day for Dad and Chris at the Exum Climbing School at Jenny Lake separates the men from the boys when it comes time to rappel, and proudly they came out manly. Rodeos, superb selections of Indian jewelry, interesting craftsmen, pizza and ice cream parlors, and the Teton Music Festival kept every member of this family happily busy for the week.

On departure day we received a rather formidable weather forecast and climbed high over the valley before heading east and up over the Wind River Range. Flying with weather in the west is interesting to easterners because, as in the south Atlantic and Caribbean, you "see what you get." You can therefore go around it or up over it if you have that capability.

We skirted a weather system to the south of the Dakotas and found Grand Island, Neb., on our chart for a lunch and fuel stop. We were treated to the red carpet service of Executive Air. Refueling is fast and courteous and a vacuum cleaner at the pumps may be used to clean up the cabin. A convenient restaurant in the terminal provides a quick and delicious lunch. You leave with the FBO's gift snack pack of bourbon balls and brownies tucked in your bag, and the whole super stop takes less than an hour.

We were in the soup and on the gauges much of the way to northern Michigan where we wanted to see the top of the lower peninsula and the Straits of Mackinac. At the last minute we had secured reservations in Harbor Springs at the Bartley House Hotel which is next door to, and cooperates with, the Boyne Highlands Resort Hotel. It has its own grass airstrip and will meet arriving fliers there, but because of the weather we landed at Pellston which has a full ILS and an FSS station. Rental cars are available, and we drove only 15 minutes to reach the resort.

We very much enjoyed the Old English atmosphere of Bartley House and the type of accommodations it offers for a family. There is a large double room for the grown-ups, and a second, adjoining room with two double bunk beds for the kids. A heated outdoor pool, a view of the ski slope's chairlift, wide grassy lawns and beautiful gardens, a golf course and tennis courts, and interesting indoor game rooms make this resort an easy, reasonable and fun-filled stop for a family.

From Pellston we came home nonstop on top, across the same weather system we'd avoided the day before. New England looked lovely and green after the dry and dusty west, and finally we succumbed to the weather and a typically Boston rainy day.

Reviewing the trip we agreed that our stopping places made the flying a success with our children. There are a few other lessons I've learned which I offer as ways to make a long leg seem shorter:

- Keep them busy. Each boy carried a busy bag in which he'd packed the things he wanted to play with, such as puzzles, little cars, playing cards, magnetized games, drawing materials (no felt marking pens). Variety is essential. I often purchase a new item along the way to maintain interest.
- Keep them full. Thin-spread peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and fruit are better snacks than crackers and chips. Dad doesn't appreciate crumbs in the cabin, and a few Baggies and napkins on hand help control debris. A midmorning snack can extend your range another hour or two.
- Keep them flying. If the pilot agrees, let them take turns in the copilot's seat. Listening through an extra set of headphones and anticipation of one's turn to do so can help two or three hours pass very quickly. They're also learning the procedures of flying and developing the appreciation of what it takes. □