

Presque Isle River empties into Lake Superior at Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park, Michigan.

SUPERIOR FALL TRAVEL

A tour of the U.S. section of Lake Superior follows scenic and rugged shoreline through Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin

Although fall in New England is legendary, tripping through autumn along Lake Superior in the U.S. Northern Tier states of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan ain't bad. In fact, it's darn special. The crowds are light, the changing leaves transform land and atmosphere to the warm glow of a campfire and the many waters double the magic. And, hey, hooray, the bugs are gone (mostly). If you don't do as my husband, George, and I did, travel during the 2013 federal government shutdown, a Superior fall flirts with perfection.

While known for Apostle Islands and Pictured Rocks national lakeshores, these federal parks only tap the Lake Superior attractions — a fortunate truth for us during the shutdown. Besides colored leaves, visitors can discover islands, shores and guiding lights; falling waters; hiking trails and historical sites. This is

the land of just-picked apples; fish-fry Fridays and smoked trout and whitefish; and pasties — portable pocket dinner pies, historically a lunch-bucket staple for Cornish miners.

Fishing, shipping, logging, copper mining and iron making forged this region. Native American place names

that tangle the tongue harken to earlier times and ways. The Keweenaw County Historical Society of Michigan's Upper Peninsula (UP) offers a fine collection of stops and tours. You might even check off the UP's seven wonders, suggested to us by a T-shirt.

In the Northern Tier, fall typically runs from late September through mid-October, with the Lake Superior shore the last to color, owing to lake-effect weather. Fall-color hotlines and Web pages for the region can hone your timing and search. Having the luxury of time — if not timing — we budgeted three weeks to the fanfare. Weather ran from chilly nights triggering the color change to rainy days

Padding on the Brule River in Wisconsin is a tranquil way to enjoy autumn color. The falls at Wisconsin's Amnicon Falls State Park can be seen from the foot bridge or the riverside trail.

to lengthy spells of Indian summer, with everything in between.

Northern Tier forests blend the profiles of the green-black evergreens: spruce, pine, hemlock and cedar with the yellow, orange and red deciduous canopy of the maple, oak, birch, aspen, ash, dogwood, basswood and beech. Wetland, shrub and understory plants broaden the color show.

The Lake Superior Circle Tour maps out travel. It follows the North Shore Scenic Byway in Minnesota and the Wisconsin Lake Superior Byway as well as various named tour routes in Michigan, including the Whitefish Bay National Forest Scenic Byway. The U.S. circle half follows Highway 61 in Minnesota and Highways 13 or U.S. 2 in Wisconsin, with Highways 28 and U.S. 41 carrying the lion's share in Michigan. Side roads into state and national forests suggest additional exploration.

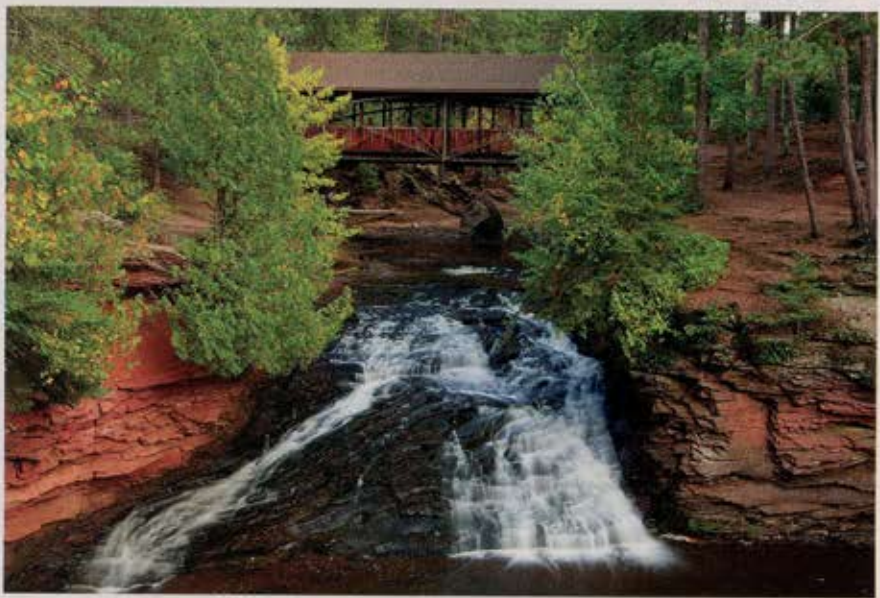
Counterclockwise, U.S. travel runs from Grand Portage to Duluth, Minnesota, and from Superior to Hurley, Wisconsin. After entering Michigan at Ironwood, the eastbound route adds a spur northeast to Copper Harbor before tracking east from Marquette to Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. But wherever you hop on board, you'll find trips of gold and plenty to do.

Easing motorhome travel are federal, state and local campgrounds, as well as private RV parks. Services range from primitive to full service. In trade for fewer services, you gain a better doorstep view.



Leaf Peeping

Fall color typically runs from late September through mid-October in the U.S. Northern Tier near Lake Superior.



Minnesota

Minnesota's North Shore provided my first acquaintance with Lake Superior. Our travels here ran between Grand Marais and Duluth, a dream landscape of forest, water and rock. Roadside parks, stops and trails allowed us to experience it all.

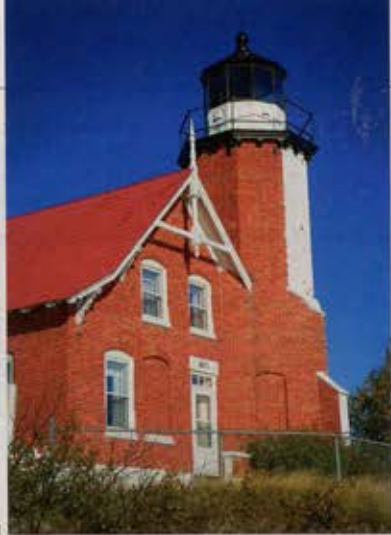
Here, scenic waters, spilling in falls and cutting through rock, race to join the inland sea. Lichen-etched cliffs, cobbled and pebbled shores, and sculpted sandy strands complement the endless blue. The picturesque lights serving mariners beckon road travelers point to point, as well.

Where bays and cliffs defined the water at Temperance River or Sugarloaf Cove, I was mindful I was admiring a Great Lake. Where the liquid expanse was unbroken, I'd inadvertently slip into my Pacific frame of mind, looking for whale

spouts I'd never find.

Grand Marais welcomes with its Municipal Park, North Superior Coast Guard Station, jetty, shore and lighthouse. Sunset photographers navigate the jetty rocks to secure an angle on the lowering sun and beacon.

The drive's waterfall lineup bids frequent stopping, with stair-stepped trails and roadside viewing. We admired the showers at Cascade River State Park, Temperance River State Park, Cross River Falls, Caribou Falls, and Tettegouche and Gooseberry Falls state parks. The tannin waters splash over the naked red or black rock in white-and-amber cascades. The framing forests and twists and turns of the rivers add to the beauty and excitement. At some, bubbles from the natural chemistry and force of the drop leave foamy abstracts on the departing



Tahquamenon Falls State Park, Michigan, has rustic and modern campsites. Grand Marais Coast Guard Station was one of five lifesaving stations along the coast of Lake Superior. Picturesque Eagle Harbor Lighthouse in Michigan is still an active light and the keeper's house serves as a museum.

river surfaces.

Cross River traces its name to Father Baraga, a missionary to the Ojibwe who erected a cross nearby in 1846, observing his watery deliverance. In a daring act to reach Grand Portage during an epidemic, Father Baraga and a Native guide left Wisconsin by canoe to cross Lake Superior. Swallowed in an unexpected storm, they washed ashore in the river's vicinity.

Split Rock Lighthouse and State Park and the Two Harbors Light Station ranked high on our sightseeing lists. With a stunning cliff promontory, Split Rock Light is a signature attraction of the North Shore. At its namesake state park, a flock of cedar waxwings feeding on mountain-ash berries vied for our attention. At Two Harbors, we toured the red brick light and the Frontenac pilot house and learned about Great Lakes shipping and shipwrecks.

Duluth has its own lights, along with the Glensheen garden estate and freshwater Great Lakes Aquarium.

Wisconsin

In Wisconsin we continued the waterfall discovery and extended our lake celebration, taking the Grand Tour, the popular cruise along Apostle Islands. We attempted, not always succeeding, to match the attraction to the weather — overcast days for waterfalls and forest, sunshine for lakeshores and vistas. Having a dinghy vehicle allowed us to take in one of the region's celebrated hikes to St. Peter's Dome, a rock vantage overlooking the color mosaic of Chequamegon-Nicolet National

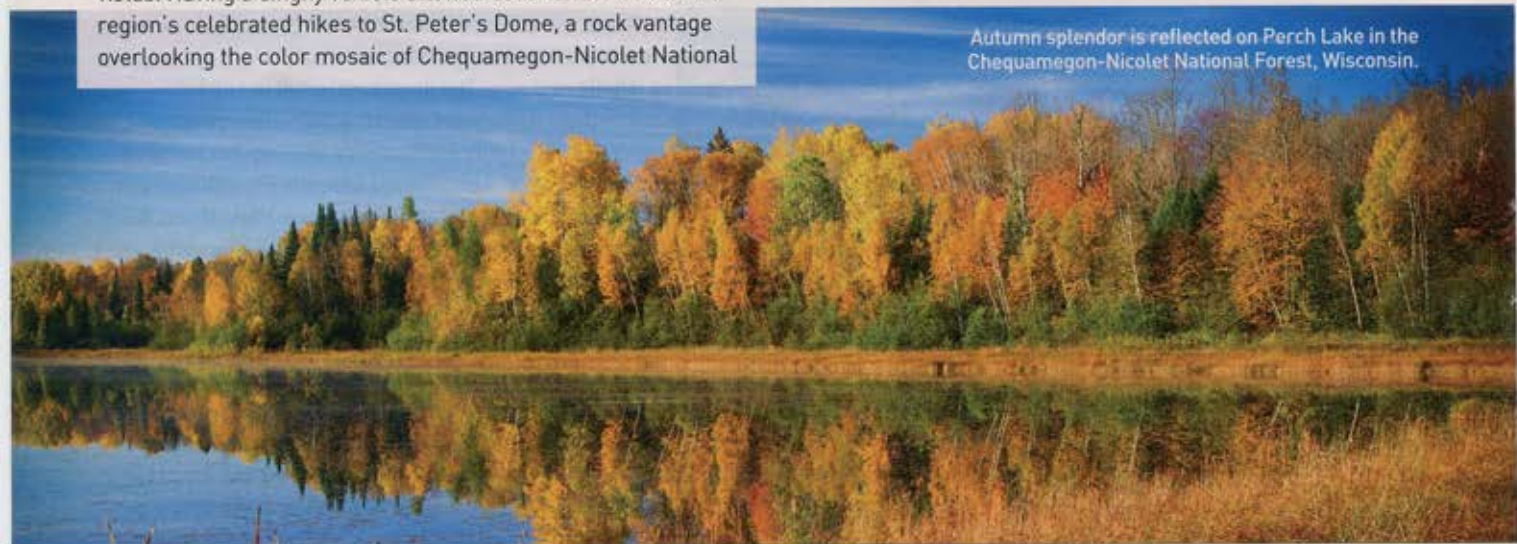
Forest in Ashland County.

Where Pattison State Park offered up the long plummet of Big and cliff-plunge of Little Manitou Falls on the Black River, Amnicon Falls State Park enticed us with its gentle, romantic falls, skipping and cascading over plated rock, with covered Horton Bridge to seal the spell. At the Brule River, we admired more of the region's tannin waters, a historic forest influenced by the axes and shovels of the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the leafy path of the North Country National Scenic Trail, which runs from North Dakota to New York — America's red-plaid, roll-up-your sleeves territory.

The Grand Tour departs Bayfield, an attractive hillside community on the lake and host to the fall apple festival. The three-hour boat tour covers 55 miles, visiting the outskirts of the treed islands composing Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. The tour spotlights sea caves, a fishing camp and the island lights. Narration tells of interesting characters, mishaps, wildlife and occupations. We watched crew in a small fishing boat haul nets.

En route to Ashland, we bought a peck of apples at a farmstand and visited the nature trails and boardwalks of the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, a wetland environment. At Ashland, we camped; strolled the Mural Walk, which hints at the town character and origin; and took in the waterfront. An interior drive then carried us to Michigan.

Autumn splendor is reflected on Perch Lake in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Wisconsin.



Michigan, Upper Peninsula

Through Minnesota and Wisconsin, fall's color teased and tantalized us with subtle brushstrokes and pockets of fireworks. By Michigan, it screamed, "Look at me!"

This pleasing gilded backdrop steered us from the Porkies (Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park) to Eagle and Copper Harbors and on to Whitefish Bay. Our Michigan ramble rounded up waterfalls, lights, historical sites and sent us in search of an unusual self-pulled raft with cut-out middle for viewing the spring-fed depths and resident big trout of Indian Lake (Kitch-iti-iki at Palms Book State Park).

The Black River route out of Bessemer called for an early detour north with a handful of waterfalls, an attractive harbor and Lake Superior shore access. It primed the pump for our Porcupine Mountains detour out of Wakefield.

The Porkies lay out a popular, accessible recreation park with two areas of exploration: Presque Isle River, with its waterfall showcase; and Lake of the Clouds, with its escarpment trail and overlooks of the lake and wooded expanse. The more energetic can find lonesome places, but these attractions are worth joining the crowd.

At Presque Isle River, the lower, Manabezho Falls is the site's tallest at 25 feet and wider than it is tall. Manido at the middle is cascading, wearing potholes in the layered rock. Upstream, Nawadaha Falls completes the set. Multilevel boardwalks and catwalks connect them, while old-growth hemlock, yellow birch and sugar maple crowd out light and add to the stage.

The skyline escarpment walk at Lake of the Clouds is popular with photographers, tripods abound, and sunrise attracts a huge fellowship of shutterbugs. Union Bay campground is a popular base.

The Keweenaw Historical Society struts its stuff at Eagle Harbor. Among the units are the Eagle Harbor Light, Schoolhouse and Life-Saving Station. Elsewhere, holdings include a historic town, blacksmith shop, church and mine; brochures help with charting travel. Copper Harbor, at peninsula's end, offers

a quaint village, orderly Fort Wilkins, and the scenery and vistas along Brockway Mountain Road.

With the freedom afforded by a passenger vehicle, we took in the sights, waters and trails of Ottawa National Forest, including the Silver Mountain Trail. Its stairway to the sky alone warranted viewing.

Waterfall chasers find ample reward with Bond, Agate and Tahquamenon Falls, all of national merit. My favorite falls, though, was the more understated Canyon Falls accessed at a roadside rest. Seen under drenching rain, it still won my admiration.

Marquette and area, with a full range of services, may waylay travel with the Michigan Iron Industry Museum, Harbor Light and Maritime Museum, and bluff walk at Presque Isle Point. A bluff monument honors the life and passing of centenarian Chief Charley Kawbawgam, the last of the Chippewa chiefs. East of Marquette, private Lakenenland Sculpture Park, with limited parking, examines the whimsical and political with brightly painted wildlife, Martians, loggers, and beasties, all puzzled together from pieces of metal scrap.

Too few days and a whirlwind of options shooed us east. A shelf cloud at Au Train Bay; historic Bay Furnace; a grudging inland bypass of Grand Island National Recreation Area and Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore; the wind-swept wonder at Whitefish Point, with its Light, Coast Guard Station and Bird Observatory; and the beauty of Whitefish Bay Scenic Byway polished off our Lake Superior acquaintance, but we'll be back. The invitation is too strong. **M**

Trip Resources

Explore Minnesota, 888-868-7476,
www.exploreminnesota.com

Lake Superior Circle Tour
www.lakesuperiorcircuitour.info

Michigan Economic Development Corporation, 888-784-7328,
www.michigan.org

Wisconsin Department of Tourism
800-432-8747, www.travelwisconsin.com