

Scenic Backroads: Autumn Splendor

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By Renee and Kris

Fall has arrived in southeast Michigan; the leaves are changing, the air has turned crisp, darkness comes early. Mother Nature beckons us to spend time outdoors, soak in the warmth of the sun, the aroma of burning logs; we long to walk and hear the swish and crunch of fallen leaves, marvel at the colors that have painted the landscape. Today Kris and I are heading out to Oakland County to do just that! Rochester Rd travels through cities large and small, once you get north of Rochester, the road changes from hectic to relaxing, a scenic rural postcard.





Foglers Orchard and Farm Market sits roadside, in Summer you can purchase a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, this time of year pumpkins and apples take center stage. It's chilly this morning, roll-up doors encourage the sun to warm the building. White paper Peck bags bulge with freshly picked apples: Empire, Golden Delicious, Gala and Mac's are just a few of the varieties available, the scent of apples permeates the air. Huge heads of cauliflower, broccoli and brussel sprouts still on the stalk line the counter. A bin overflows with colorful gourds and teeny tiny pumpkins. In the greenhouse area families take on the all-important task of picking just the right pumpkin; out back a tractor takes folks on a hayride around the property.





Back on Rochester Rd. Maples add a splash of color, the street begins to wind as we meander into the countryside. A ways up (near 32 Mile) we make a turn onto Predmore Rd to check out Cranberry Lake Farm Historic District. Oakland Township was one of the original 25 townships when the Territory of Michigan was organized in 1827, this particular property was the farmstead of John Axford, he built the Greek Revival house here in the 1840's. The farm was purchased by Jacob Kline in 1848, the family continued to operate the farm until 1925. In 1939 Detroit Howard Coffin, an oil company executive and US congressman (who lived in Detroit's Sherwood Forest) converted the farm to a country retreat; the house was enlarged, a field stone fireplace added, buildings updated. In 1996 the township purchased the farm, it is now on the National register of Historic Places. There are 10 buildings, a garden and orchard on the 16 acre historic district which sits adjacent to the 233 acre Cranberry Lake Park. Let's have a look.



We park the Jeep near the beautifully restored Flumerfelt barn, this post and beam structure dates back to 1879. Rusty antique farm equipment is on display, the lush, green grass is sprinkled with leaves. The house is not open, but I can see the fireplace through the windows—very cozy, the buildings are well maintained. In the distance we see a freshly mowed pathway leading away from the farm, how about a walk? Here the trees are already bare, weeds and wildflowers have died off leaving interesting looking seed pods. The sun peeks in and out from the clouds, a strong breeze gives flight to yellow and brown leaves. We are led into the woods, sunlight dapples the dirt trail, low boardwalks keep the feet of hikers dry in rainy periods. The trail takes us in and out of the woods back to the wide grassy trail ending back at the barn. It is here that we spot the Cranberry Lake barn quilt designed by Mary Asmus, it's quite lovely.





Continuing on Rochester Rd we veer onto Drahner road, Lakeville Cemetery is just a little west, it's one of those small, quaint, very old cemeteries you find in the country, this one was established in 1843. Following a very narrow dirt road we park near the gazebo, here the Maples are steeped in color, vibrant reds, oranges and yellows, even a little lime green. We walk the hilly terrain reading tombstones dating back to the 1800's, many are so worn by the elements I can no longer read the inscriptions. At one time it was common to write out the exact age of the deceased—years, months, right down to the number of days. Evergreen and Pines occupy one section, the ground below thick with long brown needles, it is here we discover the headstone belonging to Minoru Yamasaki and his wife Teruko. The man who changed the face of architecture, bringing us buildings such as One Woodward, Mc Gregor Memorial Conference Center on the campus of WSU and of course, most notably, the World Trade Center, is represented here by a simple headstone, a large rock rests adjacent. Tombstones are each unique in design, personal tributes to those who have passed, the grounds here are gorgeous, it's so peaceful.



Our journey continues taking us into Lakeville, vintage cars out for a drive pass us as they head the opposite direction. We hang a right on Main Street, a few old structures remain, the Mill has been recently restored, painted white with red accents. Back on Rochester Rd the street hooks one direction, then another, it's hilly here, we twist and turn past attractive homesteads, picturesque barns and splendid Fall scenery. In the northern portion of Addison Township we stop at Watershed Preserve, a 229 acre nature preserve with 4 kettle lakes and inter-connected wetlands within rolling glacial moraine deposits. The purpose of the preserve is to protect and preserve this extremely sensitive watershed and wildlife habitat. The wetlands here form the headwaters for the Belle, Clinton and Flint river systems.



We start out on a grassy trail, referring to the large map of the preserve we choose the orange trail; leaves are just beginning to color, many are still green. The path narrows, we snake our way through the woods to one of the lakes, a dock allows us a closer look at the clear water. The next lake is larger, beavers have built themselves a mansion near the shore, the water is perfectly still, a mirror image of the sky covers the surface of the lake. Kris makes his way to the dock, getting a better look at Loon Lake. The trail changes in elevation as it curls through maturing second-growth forests and meadows, we loop around finding ourselves where we started.





Our roadtrip continues, we turn left on Dryden Rd, a Porche club is out on a fall color tour, I lost count after 40 cars. We are immersed in splendid scenery; silos peek out from dried-up cornstalks, long-standing churches charm us as we pass, Oaks and Maples are showy with color. We stop at High Street Eatery in Metamora for lunch, the taupe and white building resembles a home more than a business. Menu selections are made from scratch, in house, bread and baked goods come from Crust in Fenton. We sit in the front room with a pretty view looking out onto the street.



The special of the day is an open-faced hot turkey sandwich, we order ours on the Saskatoon Prairie Seed bread, the turkey is moist, there's just enough gravy. A generous portion of mashed potatoes, stuffing and corn also share the plate. Our Michigan salad arrives at the same time, a heap of greens is topped with apples, walnuts dried cherries and a tasty vinaigrette, everything is delicious. It has been a day well-spent in nature enjoying scenic roads that rise and fall, coiling through beautiful countryside. It's a delightful time of year to get out and enjoy the beauty.

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