

My Dream Trip to the Porkies

By Dennis Knight

If I were to make a list of dream destinations, I would certainly include Ireland, Scotland and England, Europe, especially by rail, maybe even a ride on the Orient Express, India, Japan and the South Seas. But typically, when wanderlust actually strikes me, I think first of so many fascinating places to be discovered right here in America. Today, I'm dreaming up another great road trip, for either this year or next, to see the autumn colors in the forests and Great Lake shores of Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

I will avoid Interstate highways when I can, and expect to drive over thirty-five hundred miles, with side excursions. The route will run northeast through the towns of Nebraska and South Dakota, into Minnesota, avoiding Minneapolis. I will cross the mighty Mississippi at St Cloud, then the Saint Croix National Scenic River into Wisconsin, seeing Lake Superior for the first time at Ashland. I will cross into Michigan at Ironwood and drive on to my principle destination of a cabin on the Keweenaw Peninsula just north of the tall hardwood forests of the Porkies, properly known as the Porcupine Mountains.

The cabin I have picked out of the web brochures is on the bank of Lake Superior near Great Conglomerate Falls. It will be my hub from which to explore not just the Porkies and the Keweenaw Peninsula, but beyond. I will see the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, Canyon Falls in Baraga County, and Tahquamenon Falls State Park. I will inhale the cool mist of streams and waterfalls thundering below a fragrant autumn canopy of red, yellow and orange. I will stroll through Marquette, a college town that calls itself a wilderness, but it's the Peninsula's largest city.

Michiganders know the Upper Peninsula as the U.P. Its residents are Yoopers, and their odd dialect is Yooper. It's a blend of mostly English, Scandinavian and Finnish, with influences of French Canadian, Flemish, German and Native American. I expect getting by in conversation will be only a minor challenge, or at least I hope so, because I can't find a Yooper-to-English app for my iPhone. Yoopers do laugh at themselves, claiming the U.P. is the supplier of mosquitoes to the free world and advising travelers Yoopers have only two seasons, swat and shovel.

After five days of short explorations from my hub in the Porkies, I will drive to the eastern corner of the U.P. and spend the night at Sault St. Marie. The next morning I will pass through the Mackinac Island region before crossing the Mackinaw Bridge into the Lower Peninsula of Michigan.

Wending my way west, I will again avoid interstates and larger cities, going through Grand Rapids rather than Detroit, and Gary rather than Chicago. I will continue west through places like Hannibal, Chillicothe, and Marysville, and close the giant loop back home in Colorado, where I gonna add little Yooper to da local Windsor Gardens talk, eh? Yah betcha.