

ELK RAPIDS NEWS

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PHOTO BY DANA VANNOY

NW Antrim County

Finding the best route for Fall Colors

By Gerry Sell, Correspondent

We asked correspondents Gerry Sell and Priscilla Miller to give us some tips for a scenic color tour of beautiful western Antrim County, with Gerry's contribution here and Priscilla's on page 11. We also got permission from Mark Stone of Michigan Maps here in Elk Rapids to use this beautiful Elk Rapids Area map that is also featured in the center of our Local Phone Book. We added highlights of the tours with his permission and strongly recommend readers consider purchasing his popular Chain of Lakes posters available at Corner Druggist, or his handy, heavily detailed Northwest Region of Michigan Pocket Road Map, available at The Moose. Some routes run off the map, which is sized for readability. Enjoy the color! – Editor

It's almost time for the big show. With a little judicious planning, you can see maples flaming against a background of pines, aspen shimmering against a dark sky, the bay changing colors as clouds swirl overhead, pumpkins piled at farm stands. You can eat perfect apples. You can hear geese honking as they rise from the corn stubble and disappear over a red barn.

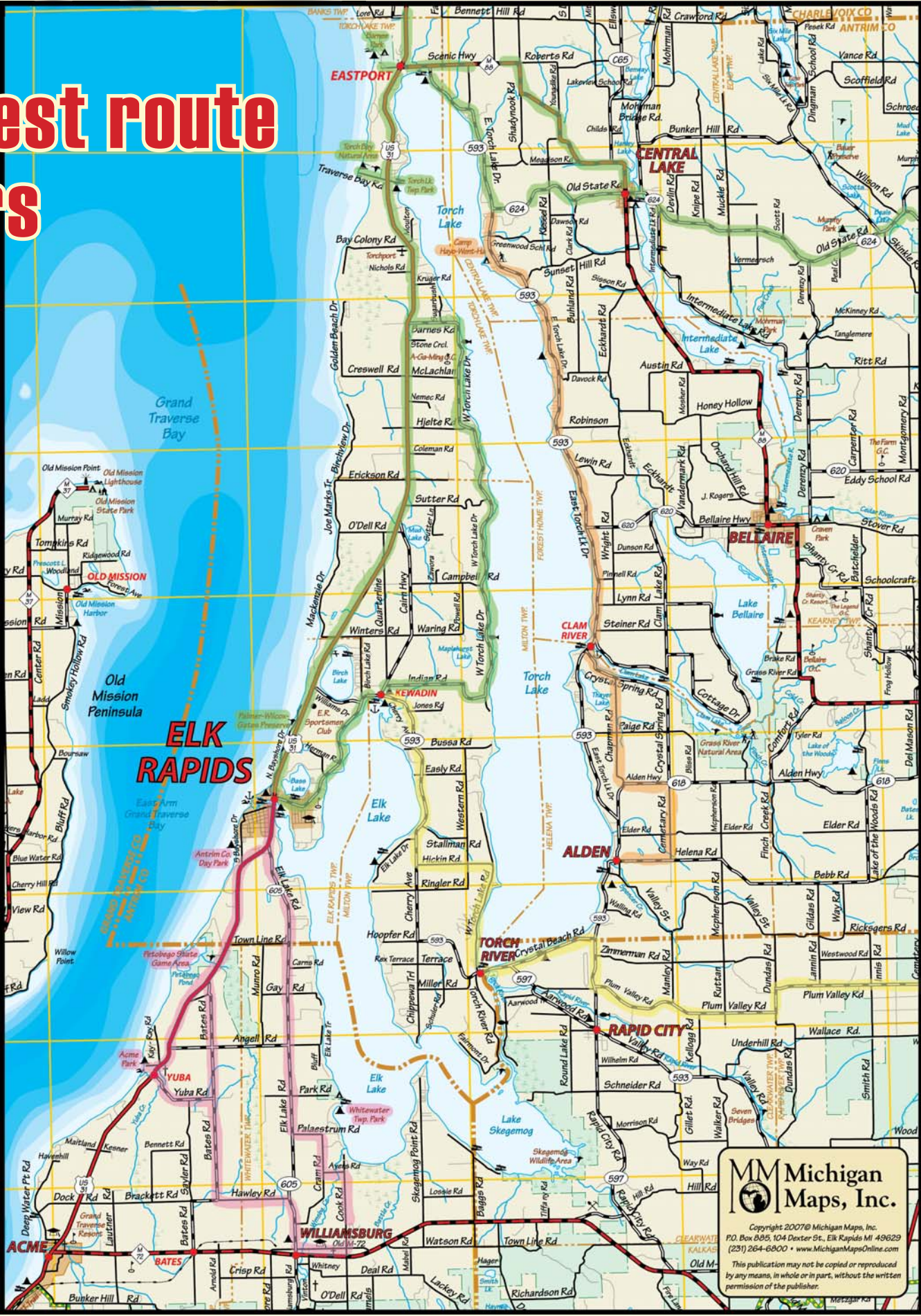
Make an early start. It's going to be a lovely day. From Elk Rapids, head east on Ames. Follow it as it becomes Cairn Highway and curves around the northern tip of Elk Lake into Kewadin, where it makes a sharp left turn at the Oasis tavern. Just past the firehouse, turn right on Indian Road and follow it as it dips down to NW Torch Lake Drive. Turn left and follow Torch Lake Drive north for seven wooded miles, catching glimpses of the lake sparkling between the trees. Turn left on Barnes Road and follow it to US-31. Turn right and follow US-31 north into Torch Lake Village.

Stop at Sonny's Torch Lake for breakfast. The cinnamon rolls are outstanding. Pick up provisions for the road – good cheese, a big selection of crackers, tomato bruschetta spread – or head to the meat counter at the rear of the store to buy some of Sonny's own sausage to take home.

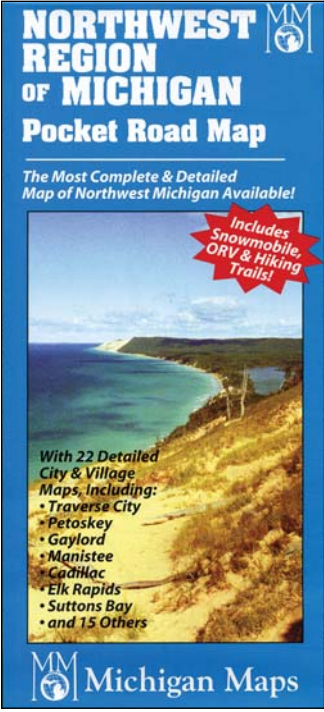
Bay lovers should head across US-31 from Sonny's, where Traverse Bay Road leads to the Torch Bay Nature Preserve. There is a rustic boat launch, handy boulders to sit on while you watch the waves, and several trails through the hardwood forest. There are no restrooms, but there is a wheelchair accessible boardwalk and a platform overlooking a beach pond that, depending on the weather, may be a pond, a marsh, or a grassy bowl.

Continued on page 2

Map courtesy of Michigan Maps, 104 Dexter St., Elk Rapids, MI 49629. (231) 264-6800. www.michiganmapsonline.com Used with permission.



SERVING THE ELK RAPIDS ALDEN KEWADIN RAPID CITY
EASTPORT TORCH RIVER BRIDGE WILLIAMSBURG AREAS



If you prefer a lovely view of Torch Lake, take a right on Public Dock Road just north of Sonny's. The William Good Day Park offers plenty of picnic tables, grills, a play structure, a swimming/wading beach, and a boat launch. Go ahead – stroll out to the end of the pier and sit with your feet dangling. Just look for awhile. The park and its ADA-accessible restrooms are open daily from 9:00 a.m. to dark all summer, and on weekends through October 15.

Go back to US-31 and head north to Eastport. Continue past M-88. The Eastport Market is on the left. The fried chicken in the deli is so good that truckers plan their routes around it. The first road on the left past the Eastport Market is Old Dixie Highway, otherwise known as the Flat Road. Turn left (west) onto Old Dixie and follow it as it makes a 90-degree turn to the north. (Sorry, our illustration runs out here.)

There are many maples along the way, some of them over a hundred years old. There is a picturesque stone silo, an old cemetery full of Civil War veterans and people whose names are the same as those on the roads hereabouts.

About three miles along, on the west side of the road, you'll come to the southern entrance to the Antrim Creek Natural Area. (If you miss that entrance, there's another a mile or so north at the foot of Rex Beach Road.) Numerous trails will take you across dunes, through the woods, or on a loop through an archeological site. Two trails are barrier free hard-packed gravel and boardwalk. There are ADA-compliant portable toilets next to the parking areas at each end of the 156-acre preserve.

After leaving Antrim Creek, continue north on Old Dixie to Richardson Road, the northern boundary of Antrim County. Turn right (east) on Richardson and follow it to US-31, stopping at the top of the rise to admire the views. Watch for the wild turkeys. At US-31, turn right (south) and head toward Atwood the Adorable. The rolling terrain is dotted with pastures, orchards and woodlots.

This stretch offers something for everyone, although keep in mind that many of the retail outlets are closed on Sunday. At the Resortwear North outlet you can find an irresistible yellow waterproof jacket in toddler sizes. Farther south, Friske's Farm Market is the perfect place for families with small children. They can explore the Noah's Ark playscape, feed goats and chickens and rabbits, browse through books and puzzles and toys, enjoy a treat from the bakery, and choose their favorite apples. There's more: a full-service café, a Christmas shop, food specialties, Michigan novelties. Older children will want to stop a little farther south at Royal Farms, where they can test themselves in the corn maze or take a hayride through the orchard. On the south side of Atwood the John Deere Work N Play Store beckons. Inside is a sea of green and yellow riding toys, sandbox toys, cast metal miniatures, shirts, caps, boots, bandannas, books, puzzles and more. (They also sell grown up Stihl tools and a pair of blaze orange chaps to wear while you're using your chain saw. This place is comprehensive.)

Continue south on US-31 back to Eastport. Turn left (east) on M-88 and follow it as it winds east and south toward Central Lake. Stop at King Orchards to stock up on a variety of apples, pears and plums, along with a woven market basket to carry them in. Watch for the elk ranch. Continue into Central Lake. Across from the Blue Pelican Inn turn left on North

Street to visit the Friendly Book Cottage, where volunteers sell gently used books to benefit the library. They have an excellent selection of children's books as well as novels, cookbooks, Michigan themes and more. Back on Main Street go bargain-hunting at the Treasure Chest consignment shop. Stop at Bachmann's General Store for – well, just about anything. Browse Adams Madams for unusual gifts and home décor. Turn east on Old State Road, and park just beyond the bridge. Admire Intermediate Lake from the car or from the accessible ramp and boardwalk. If you want to get out on the Chain of Lakes, go across the road to The Crossings, where you can rent a boat.

We are now headed to one of my favorite views. Continue east on Old State Road for about six miles, through Pleasant Valley. A green highway sign points to East Jordan and M-66. Take the left turn on Kidder Road toward East Jordan. Follow Kidder as it twists, turns, and rises. About a mile past the intersection with Finkton Road, Kidder makes a sharp left curve. There is a metal guardrail on the right. Park on the shoulder just beyond the guardrail, and look out across the Jordan Valley. Do not yield to the temptation to wander into the pasture. This is a working farm, and the livestock will not welcome visitors.

Continue on Kidder as it winds down to M-66. Turn right on M-66 and follow it almost five miles south to Old State Road. Save the Jordan Valley drive for another day and turn right on Old State Road. On the way back to Central Lake you'll pass a buffalo ranch on your left.

In Central Lake, continue west on Old State Road rather than turning onto M-88. At the intersection of Old State and East Torch Lake Drive, turn right and follow the road north. If the weather holds, Brownwood will still be open. Watch for it on your left. Take a trip back in time. Sit on the porch of the General Store and savor one of Mary Lou DeTar's famous donuts. OK, have two. When you can tear yourself away, go back out to the road and turn left (north) toward Eastport, enjoying views of Torch Lake on your left. Turn left on M-88. Now it's time to choose your sunset view.

Option one. When M-88 runs into US-31, continue west across US-31 onto Barnes Park Road, and follow it as it bears right into the county park. You'll find a grand staircase to a wide sandy beach, a tidy campground, clean ADA-accessible restrooms, a playground, wood-chipped hiking trails and a paved walking/wheeling trail. Park facilities are open through October 16. (You're welcome to visit for day use all year, but you'll have to content yourself with pit toilets.)

Option two. Head south on US-31 to Torch Lake Village, and turn right on Traverse Bay Road to the Torch Bay Nature Preserve.

Option three. Continue south on US-31 to Williams Road. Turn right on Williams and then left on North Bayshore Drive. Follow Bayshore south about two miles to the Palmer-Wilcox-Shah Nature Preserve. There are pulloffs on the right and the left, and a sign at the beginning of the short trail to the beach.

Option four. Continue back into Elk Rapids and enjoy the sunset from Veterans Memorial Park. Whatever you do, don't omit the sunset.

MORE FALL COLOR TOURS - PAGE 11