

Fall Foliage Hot Spots of Northern New England

by Michael A. Di Stefano, MNEC

The fall season is my favorite time of the year. I only wish it lasted longer. Many times the weather can play an important part in how long the leaves stay on the tree and their color. If you are retired and have the time to come and go as you please, then you will have the upper hand to maximize your potential for good shooting. If you are a 9 to 5'er, relegated to weekend excursions, then you will be at the mercy of Mother Nature. Personally, I believe a good day photographing the fall colors is worth more than a days pay, so if I know the weather will be good and it is peak conditions where I want to photograph, then its f8 and be there.

Basically, the fall colors start far up north in New England near the Canadian border and highest elevations in the White and Green Mountains. It will gradually progress southward and down the mountainsides into the valleys. Therefore, if you are planning to photograph the early weeks of color far north, you will need to book over night accommodations as day tripping that far will be impossible. There are only a few short weeks and multitudes who wish to witness this bedazzling display. Therefore, it is never too early to make reservation be it at an economy motel, historic hotel, or cozy bed & breakfast.

How does one find the quintessential fall foliage shot? Research my friends. In this game knowledge is essential. My resources include state tourism publications and web-sites. (See list at end of article) Goggle any keyword such as a state name, county name, regional name or specific site name and a cavalcade of information will be at your figure tips. You many need to spend some time finding the good info. in with the useless info., but it is time well spent. Pre-planning will make the most of your time when you are there shooting. All the New England states have official guidebooks with full size maps and various web sites that will give all that basic information you need to start on your trek. More information can be found in Chamber of Commerce publications and web sites, but beware these resources usually only tell you about the places that advertise in these resources. There are also magazines that can be subscribed to or pick up a single issue at the newsstand. Some that I like are Natural New England, Vermont Life, and Yankee magazine. Road atlases will get you in and around the backcountry roads. DeLorme atlas & gazetteer is the best. A photographer wrote a book about the popular photo-scenics in Vermont. It has 23 classic icon shots, which include the Jenne Farm, The Sugar Shack of South Woodstock, The Gray Farm (aka Sleepy Hollow Farm) and many more. A few sites are now over grown by trees, and some destroyed in some way such as fire. To order this book contact the author: Arnold J. Kaplan, APSA-AFIAP 236 Nottingham Drive Centerville, MA 02632.

So let's get down to business. Where are the best places to shoot Fall Foliage? I return time after time to the central part of Vermont in the Woodstock area. There is a great mix of farms, covered bridges, streams, waterfalls and birch trees. In South Woodstock, the famous Jenne Farm can be found just off Route 106. I never tier of this special place. Though nearly everyone in the world, from nearly every conceivable angle, has shot it I still find myself drawn by its wonderful setting. Just a half mile south of Jenne Farm on the opposite side of Route 106 is a road that leads to the most famous Sugar Shack. Both of these locations are morning shots, go to Jenne Farm first and then the Sugar Shack later. Still

farther south is Weathersfield Birches a well-hidden stand of white birches. Even with directions it may be hard to find, but for those who can visualize golden yellow leaves against a polarized blue sky and the stock white tree trunks towers over you, and if that's not enough there is a abandoned cabin that can be worked into your compositions quite well. This location can be shot in the morning or afternoon. North of the town of Woodstock is what is called "Ridge Road". A meandering dirt road though some of the prettiest farmland I have ever seen. Here you will find the famed Gray Farm. This classic is nearly as photographed as the Jenne Farm. I feel it is best shot in the afternoon, but I have seen morning shots and they were done well too.

There are some great towns to shoot that do not have an iconic composition, but are still very picturesque. Turnbridge is the typical one church, one town building and one farm type of town. It has a great over view shot from the hillside behind the town cemetery. Simply follow the road opposite the town clerk building and look back over your right shoulder. This shot takes on different characteristics based on morning or afternoon light. East Topsham is another over view shot, follow the road out of the town to the east of town center where the roads tee's. A short ride up and around to the left, look back over your left shoulder for the view. The Town of Waits River is another icon shot. Just follow the road opposite the church, cross over a small bridge and drive up the hill a few hundred feet. It has a little white church framed with houses and a dirt road leading your eye into the frame. Don't forget your red jacket, so as to have a person walking into the composition. Placey Farm is a pm shot. It is situated on the banks of a river. If the water is still enough a reflection is possible, but better would be if you were lucky enough to have a red canoe or two come paddling down the river. Placey Farm is on Route 5 north of the town of Newbury, look for it back over your right shoulder if traveling north.

So let's travel east to New Hampshire now. In my opinion, New Hampshire is more touristy and commercial where as Vermont is more cozy and country like. However, if you search down all those dirt roads, sometimes you find a gem. I will give New Hampshire the edge when it comes to covered bridges. There seems to be more of them and they are more accessible than those of VT. The trick I found with covered bridges is to get down to the banks of the river and walk up or down stream to get the most pleasing composition. A shot I have not gotten yet, but is always on my mind is the Flume covered bridge. I have seen it in many magazines and it seems to have multiple compositional angles. It works well close up with the mountains in the background and I've seen it from farther back using the dirt road as a leading line. Waterfalls abound in NH. Because waterfalls are usually situated in rocky ravines, it may be best to photograph these on overcast days to limit the contrasty lighting that may cause exposure problems. Some special places I like are Arethusa Falls & Silver Cascades in the Crawford Notch area. The Glen Ellis Falls south of Mt. Washington on Route 16 in Pinkham Notch is another location with good possibility. Kinsman Notch also has nice waterfalls. There is something about waterfalls and the fall foliage; they just seem to blend nicely to make the most pleasant images.

One hidden gem of a place is East Andover. I saw a picture in a tour book and knew I would have to track this place down. It is west of the Laconia/Franklin area, and east of Sunapee on Route 4. If VT has one church, one town building, one farm towns, than this town can only be described as one variety store, and that is it. We drove by this site 2-3 times before I spotted it out the corner of my eye. A little dirt road leads you down to a

pond that has a little white farmhouse and barn on its shores and the pond is lined with the most colorful trees I have ever seen. Early morning is the time to be here. With a cold previous night, you may have steam rising off the water and the sky will polarize a brilliant blue, as you are looking due south. The yellow, orange and red leaves compliment the blue sky and reflect in the water. I shot two rolls here without ever moving my tripod.

Some common NH places to shoot are the Kancamagus Hwy (Route 112) between Lincoln and Conway. It has a very early turning period, so plan to be there before the peak colors have come and leaf drop starts. The Franconia Notch area will provide you with many compositions to shoot. There is the cog railroad belching smoke as it ascends Mt Washington. However, I would suggest you explore whatever region you may find yourself. All areas have beautiful scenes to be shot, and I feel the lesser know areas will open your mind to see it with a fresh and original view. In addition, do not forget the smaller views of fall. There are many shots that you can find in your own "backyard" so to speak. An intimate little pond with one grand tree reflecting in the water. Find a low branch so you can shoot a few leaves backlit. And my favorite, a little cascade in a stream with mossy rocks and of coarse a few strategically placed red, orange and yellow leaves. I find nothing wrong with adding leaves into a composition. The secret, as with all composition manipulations is to make it look natural.

So pick a place in a high potential area like Woodstock VT, or the White Mountains of NH. Go with the intensions of grabbing a few photo icon shots but explore the back roads for those hidden gems. Be there to enjoy the fall colors and be open to seeing new and fresh visions to create your own personal images. Maybe you will come across a hidden gem of your own to shoot. But remember, it is always better to share your finds with others, because what you give in life will come back to reward you another day.

Web-sites resources

<http://www.virtualvermont.com/>

<http://www.travel-vermont.com/>

<http://www.visitnewengland.com/>

<http://www.visitnh.gov/>

http://alder.stonemarche.org/covered_bridges/

<http://www.foliagenetwork.com/>

<http://web.massvacation.com/jsp/index.jsp>

<http://www.weather.com>

<http://www.vtlife.com/>

<http://www.vermontvacation.com/>

<http://www.gorp.away.com>

<http://www.nhstateparks.org/>

<http://www.nh.com>

<http://www.visitmaine.com>

<http://visitrhodeisland.com/>

<http://www.wunderground.com/>