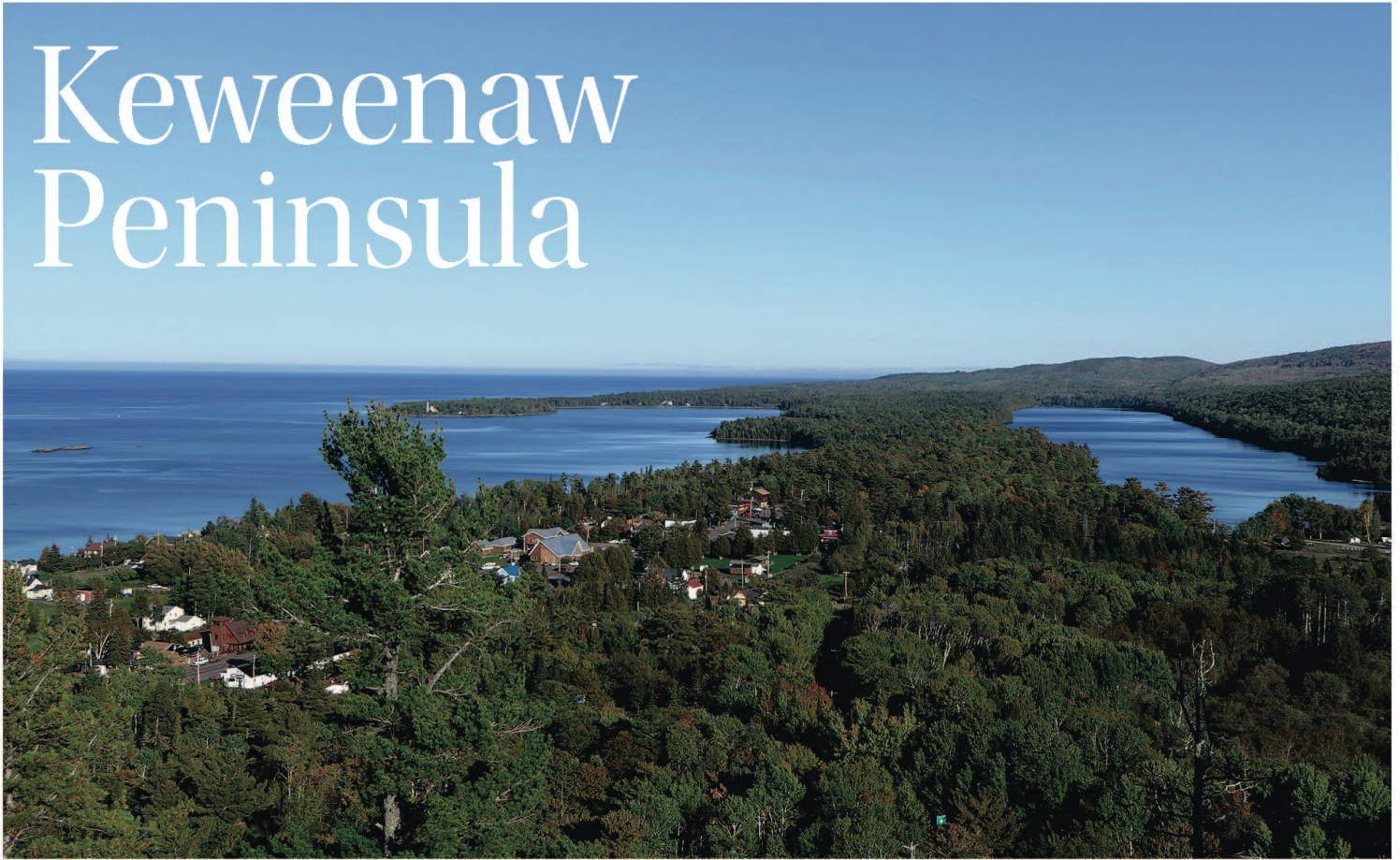


Keweenaw Peninsula



Brockway Mountain Drive provides several spots for overviews of Lake Superior, miles of forest and Copper Harbor, year-round population of 136. Historic Fort Wilkins is on Lake Fanny Hooe at upper right. (Photo by Kath Usitalo)



Long-abandoned mine shafts, crumbling industrial structures, workers' homes and gravestones of mining accident victims are reminders of the Keweenaw's copper glory days. (Photo by Kath Usitalo)

For Fall Color, Copper Country Rocks

By KATH USITALO • Special to the Journal & Topics

Jutting into Lake Superior in Michigan's western Upper Peninsula, the densely forested Keweenaw Peninsula is a year-round destination for adventurers, history buffs, wilderness seekers, rockhounds, stargazers and nature lovers.

In the last billion or so years, volcanic and glacial action created the freshwater sea that shapes the peninsula, and left it with inland lakes, sand dunes, beaches, waterfalls and rugged cliffs. Keweenaw's red and cream-colored Jacobsville sandstone built handsome structures funded by another precious resource: the bountiful and pure red metal that gave the region its Copper Country moniker.

As someone with roots in the U.P. who's been to the Keweenaw dozens of times, early autumn is my first choice for the trek to the northernmost part of the

Great Lakes State.

The last week of September into mid-October is usually best for catching the fall color display, whether biking world-class mountain trails, hiking to remote waterfalls, off-roading old logging tracks or paddling crystal-clear lakes. Or, like me, leaf-peeping through the windshield and braking for photos along curvy, two-lane roads canopied in red, orange and gold.

Follow the Copper Country Trail Byway along US-41 from Hancock to Copper Harbor, 47 miles north. Along the way, swing west on the Lake Superior-hugging M-26 for its scenic pull-offs, lighthouses and roadside waterfalls. At Jacob's Falls, the Jampot sells preserves and goodies freshly baked by Byzantine monks; their onion-domed monastery is across the road. Book a
(Continued on next page)

Copper Country

(Continued from previous page) table at Fitzgerald's for house-smoked barbecue, a craft cocktail and a Superior sunset.

Brockway Mountain Drive delivers miles-wide views from 720 feet above Lake Superior. The roadway was a Depression-era project for out-of-work miners, as was construction of nearby Keweenaw Mountain Lodge. That historic log compound is also an International Dark Sky Park open to the public for stargazing.

In tiny Copper Harbor, seek out Grandpa's Barn, a cozy bookstore sprinkled with pieces of area history in a 19th century hay barn. Browse The Laughing Loon and other gift shops, enjoy classic dinner fare at Harbor Haus and visit Fort Wilkins, built in 1844 at the start of copper fever.

Native peoples were mining copper 7,000 years ago, but it was Michigan geologist Douglas Houghton's 1841 discovery of the red metal that sparked the nation's first mineral rush. Soon, mining locations lined the spine of the peninsula, with the bustling city of Calumet at its heart. After producing about 10.5 billion pounds of copper, the boom went bust and died in 1968.

Delve into the industrial, social and human impact of the copper story at the 22 heritage sites of Keweenaw National Historical Park, including the comprehensive A.E. Seaman Mineral Museum, Quincy Mine tour and elegant Calumet Theatre. Get oriented through informational exhibits and films at the park headquarters in Calumet; check the schedule for ranger-led walking tours.

Calumet is easy to explore on your own, and it's good to see new eateries and shops popping up alongside favorites like Copper World, the go-to source for Keweenaw gifts and home goods since 1974. Frozen Farms sells local syrup, honey, their own meats (frozen) and kitchenware in their tin-ceilinged storefront.

Treat yourself to ice cream made on-site at the Copper Scoop, or cinnamon roll at Ramona's Bakery. Taste the local wild fruit in a thimbleberry margarita at Carmalita's, and get a jolt of java and breakfast or lunch at Keweenaw Coffee Works or Café Rosetta. I can't leave town without a stop at the Michigan House Café and Brewpub for an Oatmeal Express Stout and Gipp Burger, named for football standout George "The Gipper" Gipp, who waited tables there before heading to Notre Dame.

TRAVEL TIPS

- Some businesses play loose with their seasonal closing date and may shutter when the leaves are gone, so call ahead to verify hours and keep an eye on the fall color progress reports at the state's Pure Michigan tourism website.

- Cell service is spotty in much of the peninsula, and non-existent at Copper Harbor, so rely on paper maps and plan your routes and activities in advance. Fuel up; service stations can be scarce.

- Be prepared to pay cash; not all places accept cards.

RESOURCES

Visit Keweenaw: visitkeweenaw.com
 Pure Michigan: michigan.org
 Upper Peninsula Travel & Recreation: uptravel.com
 Keweenaw National Historical Park: nps.gov/kewe
 Copper Country Trail National Byway: coppercountrytrail.org

The pasty (pass-tee), a mix of meat and root veggies wrapped in a sturdy crust, was the hearty meal of miners, and remains a U.P. staple. Dig into the 2023 Pasty Fest winner at Slim's Café in Mohawk, just north of Calumet. Across the road, have a relaxed dinner at Glacia Tavern.

While in the neighborhood, shop the tasteful selection of Finnish imports, home goods, artwork and foodstuffs at Kuusi Modern Mercantile. Just look for the local landmark, a red, 1880 building with white letters declaring it The Last Place on Earth.



Colorful and quiet backroads lead to the 1899 Old Victoria Mine location, one of 22 sites of the Keweenaw National Historical Park. (Photo by Kath Usitalo)



Grandpa's Barn, Michigan's northernmost bookstore, is one of the reasons to head to Copper Harbor. (Photo by Kath Usitalo)



A mural of a festive picnic scene, painted in 1906, graces ceiling above the bar at Michigan House Café in Calumet; a red Bosch Brewing plate is at center. (Photo by Kath Usitalo)