

CP14

1341

Everyone has their own personal favorite location when it comes to enjoying the changing of the seasons. Some make annual treks into the southern Appalachians, while others head north to New England or even west to Michigan. New Hampshire, in particular, is said to boast some of the most beautiful foliage displays in the world — and if you're looking for an amazing fall-foliage tour, the Kancamagus National Scenic Byway in New Hampshire's White Mountain National Forest is one of the finest.

Also known as the "Kanc," this 34-mile-long scenic



15912

Only 34 miles long, this scenic byway in New Hampshire's White Mountains is a spectacular destination for autumn color

■ DONNA IKENBERRY

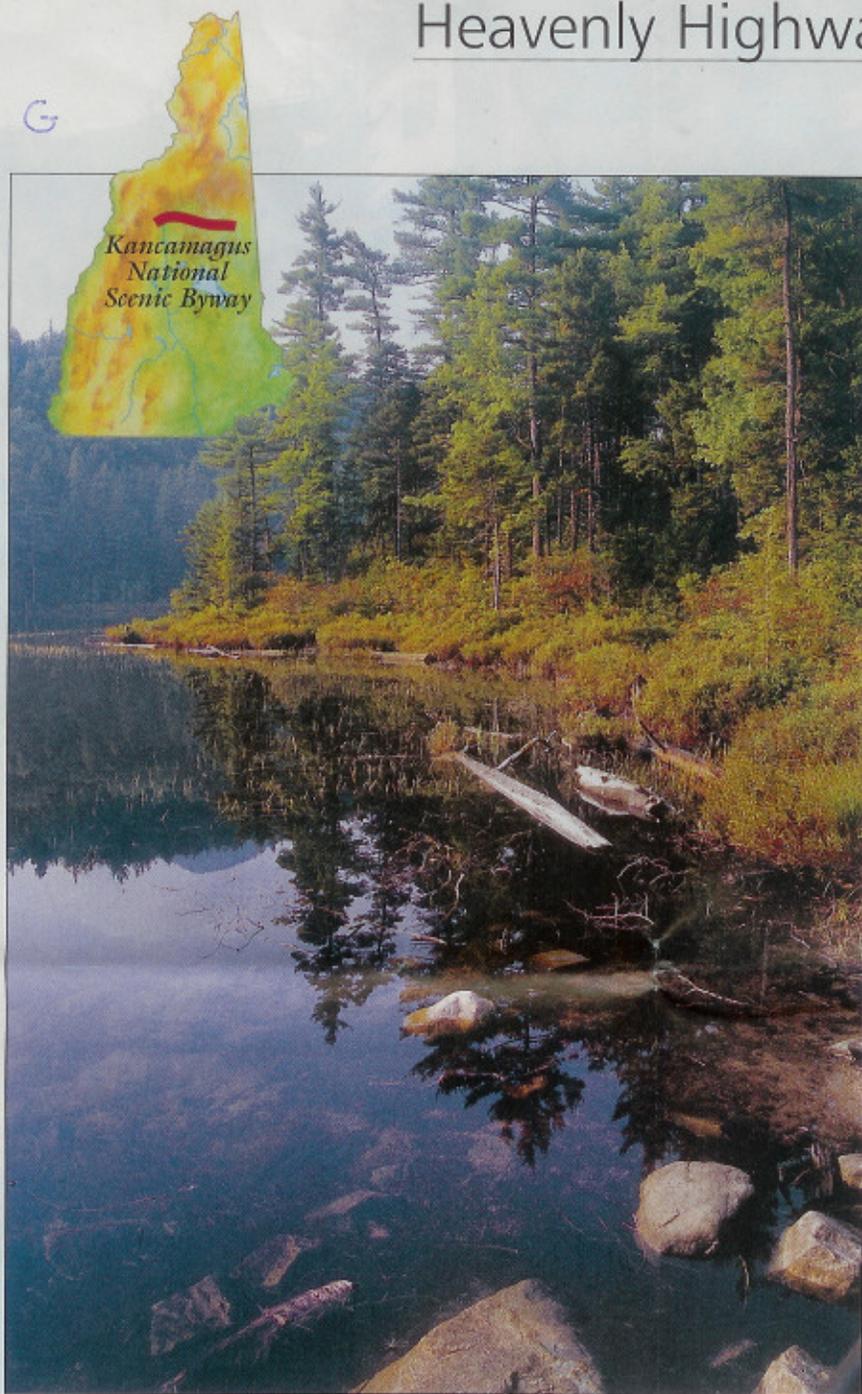
6

Heavenly Highway

Foliage still retains color in late fall along the Kancamagus Highway in New Hampshire (above). Twenty-five-foot tall Sabbaday Falls is well worth the easy hike in (top).

Heavenly Highway

G



A vista clearing helps to open the way-side view at the Pemigewasset Overlook (top). The Swiftwater Bridge, located north of State Highway 112, has a maximum vertical clearance of 12 feet, 9 inches (middle). Keep an eye out for moose along the byway (above). Leave plenty of time to stop and pull off the road to enjoy the scenic woods and wilderness along the Kanc (left).

byway is a potpourri of scenic vistas, hiking trails, waterfalls, historic sites, wildlife, picnic spots and campgrounds.

The Kanc, which stretches from the Pemigewasset River at the town of Lincoln on the west, to the city of Conway on the east, follows the path of State Highway 112; more than 90 percent of this route traverses through the scenic White Mountain National Forest.

The byway, which is also a designated National Forest Byway and a New Hampshire State Scenic Byway, was named for Chief Kancamagus of the

Penacook Confederacy. In the late 17th century, the chief, called "The Fearless One," was known for his peacemaking efforts between the Confederacy and European settlers. The truce failed around 1691, however, and Chief Kancamagus and his followers moved into northern New Hampshire and Canada.

Although my husband, Mike, and I had planned on visiting during the height of fall color, we were a bit early — or, you could say the fall colors were a little late (according to foliagenetwork.com, the season begins in early September in the

northern regions and runs through October). Even so, it was well worth the drive. We approached the byway at the western terminus of State Highway 112, where it intersects with U.S. Highway 302, though this is not part of the official scenic byway.

Heading southeast, we arrived in Swiftwater and stopped to explore the wonder of the Swiftwater Covered Bridge. One of only 20 remaining paddleford truss-covered bridges in the world, it was built in 1849 and rebuilt in 1977. The 150-foot-plus bridge spans the Wild Ammonoosuc River.

Heavenly Highway

G

Actually, the middle belt of New Hampshire that encompasses the White Mountains is said to be home to more than a dozen covered bridges, all built between 1829 and 1931; more details can be found at foliagenetwork.com,

and clicking on the THINGS TO DO icon for the White Mountains.

As we continued east, passing over the Appalachian Trail, we approached the western entrance to the scenic byway at the town of

Lincoln. Located five miles east of town, the Lincoln Woods Visitor Center makes a good starting point to the byway. The center provides area information, trail maps and recreation passes — make sure you get a pass

Whistle Stops

While motorhomes offer a warm, cozy environment with a lot of windows to view fall foliage, the White Mountains is also home to several other mediums for viewing the change of seasons.

It may still be too early for snow, but the gondolas are available for scenic viewing at Wildcat Mountain Ski Area (888-SKI-WILD, skiwildcat.com) in Pinkham Notch, north of Jackson and just east of State Highway 16. Said to be New Hampshire's highest four-passenger gondola skyride, it climbs more than 2,000 feet in just six minutes.

More leisurely trips await, however, courtesy of the railroads that remain open during the short leaf-turning season.

Farther north along State Highway 16, exiting at Base Road (to Mount Washington) will take you to the Mount Washington Cog Railway (800-922-8825, thecog.com). This "engineering marvel" of 1869 relies on a steam-powered locomotive to push a single car a mile up the mountain using toothed cog gears and rack rails. The tracks are so steep, in fact, that the boiler on the steam engine appears canted at a ridiculous angle — but rides horizontally for much of the trip. There's a museum at the base, and an observation center at the summit.

The Conway Scenic Railroad (800-232-5251, conwayscenic.com) runs a nostalgic steam locomotive on a 55-minute ride skirting State Highway 16 between Conway and North Conway as late as December, with limited service between North Conway and Bartlett. The Hobo Railroad (603-745-2135, hoborr.com) and Winnepesaukee Scenic Railroad (606-745-2135, hoborr.com/winni.html) offer a number of special "Foliage Trains," ranging from a 1½-hour tour along the Pemigewasset River out of Lincoln, to full-day trips between Lincoln and Meredith (along State Highway 25 on Lake Winnepesaukee Bay). Most ticket prices include lunch; higher-priced entry offers an increasing amount of creature comforts, culminating in the President's Class, a Piano Parlor Car with easy chairs and couches for seating and a hot buffet lunch. — Bruce Hampson

so that you can park at the trailheads along the byway. During our visit, we learned that there are many trails to be enjoyed along the Kanc, ranging in difficulty from easy to strenuous. The visitor center itself is a trailhead for the Lincoln Woods Trail, a 180-foot suspension bridge.

Following the byway, we found ourselves traveling slowly and stopping often. There are four spectacular overlooks along the road and two on each side as you reach the top of Kancamagus Pass — the highest point of the scenic byway. We enjoyed seeing fall colors, searching for moose and seeing and photographing waterfalls.

Of the many waterfalls found along the way, Sabbaday Falls was our favorite. With its lovely pools and series of cascades, the 25-foot falls are worth the short quarter-mile walk to view them. Named by early explorers of the Passaconaway Valley who turned around at the falls on a Sunday (or Sabbath Day), the area provides picnic

tables and a lovely trail to the falls, though swimming is not allowed. In addition, you can also find cascades and falls at Champney Falls, Rocky Gorge and the Lower Falls.

We spent part of an afternoon near the Swift River at the Russell-Colbath Homestead, a fine example of an 1830s farmhouse. Our interpretive guide, a charming woman dressed in period attire, told us the story of the people who once lived here. Thomas Colbath left one fall day in 1891 after telling his wife, Ruth, that he would return "in a little while." For whatever reason, a little while stretched into a good many years, but as the story goes, Ruth kept a light in a window every night to help guide Thomas home, until her death in 1930. Colbath finally did return, in 1933, and upon learning that Ruth had died and that her nieces and nephews had inherited the home, he left again — and never returned.

The home is listed on the

National Register of Historic Places, and is a part of the Passaconaway Historic Site. The site is open every day during the summer and early fall through Columbus Day. We marveled at the home, read the tombstones in the local cemetery and walked the easy ¼-mile Swift Rail and River Trail loop to the Swift River.

While the turning of the leaves brings out a great many admirers, the region also hosts other events that can be combined for a memorable weekend — and dramatically bump up Lincoln's residency. In 1790, the town had 22 residents, and as evidenced by the 2000 census (population: 1,271) it hasn't grown much since then. Between September 22-24, however, it will swell considerably as the NH Highland Games return to nearby Loon Mountain. One of the largest Scottish Games in North America, the games are said to attract more than 20,000 spectators daily.

Just north of Loon Mountain,