



Fall Road Trip to Vermont

The back roads and bridges among the wooded hills

By Wendy & Rob Lindsay

Crisp fall days with sunny skies can make one year for a road trip to explore new places. One such day we threw overnight bags in the car and headed out in search of Vermont's covered bridges.

From Montreal we crossed the Champlain Bridge heading south. Instead of getting on Highway 35 immediately we ran along Highway 133 on the eastern shore of the Richelieu River. Highway 35 next carried us across flat farmland where the remnants of the Seigneurial system could still be seen – the farm buildings near the road and the fields divided into long strips. Tempting antique stores and coffee shops were scattered among the farms.

Photography, Lindsay Editorial



Famous for its maple syrup, come fall the sugar maples are by far the most splendid crimson and scarlet trees in any landscape.

The friendly folks at the Vermont Welcome Centre were a good source of maps and current travel information. Apparently we were just behind the peak of fall colour and the crush of “leaf-peepers” that go with it. Traveling midweek would also help avoid the fall crowds – a definite advantage of retired life.

A few kilometres farther on, the terrain changed abruptly from the old river flood plains of Quebec into the steep rolling wooded hills of Vermont. The vistas across the forest seemed to roll on and on forever to the horizon. We were pleased there was still enough brilliant crimson, russet and gold fall foliage to be a magnificent sight in the sunshine.

About 165 kilometres south of Montreal we reached the lively little city of Burlington (population 39,000). This year the university town, located on the shores of beautiful Lake Champlain, is in a festive mood celebrating the 400th anniversary of Samuel de Champlain, the first known European to visit the lake, which now bears his name. At 190 kilometres long, Lake Champlain is sometimes referred to as the sixth Great Lake. The magnificent fall setting, with the Green Mountains of Vermont on one side and the Adirondacks of New York on the other, can best be viewed from the water aboard one of the three ferries which ply the lake or the 90-minute narrated cruise on the Spirit of Ethan Allen III.

Just South of Burlington, off Highway 7, is the Shelburne Museum, Vermont’s largest. It covers 45 acres and houses one of the most extensive collections of fine art, folk art, artifacts and Americana in the U.S. Their eclectic collection of over 150,000 works is displayed throughout 37 buildings in a village-like setting. These 18th and 19th century homes and farm structures were gathered from across New England and relocated to the site. Among them we spied our first covered bridge.



Vermont Wildflower Farm, an inspiring stop for gardeners.

Each little place seemed to have an antique shop, often with their wares spread out in the sunshine, and the stop at the Vermont Wildflower Farm had been an inspiration for our home gardening.

The centrepiece of the museum is the last commercial operating side-wheeler in the U.S. – the 220-foot steamboat, Ticonderoga. The documented story of its overland journey



Covered bridge near Barnard scarcely bigger than a garage.

to its resting place is amazing. Fortunately museum tickets are good for two consecutive days, for you’ll need that much time to see everything. If you can’t come in the fall, the third weekend of May is a spectacular time when Lilac Sunday showcases over 400 lilac bushes in bloom.

Instead of zipping south on efficient I-89 and I-91 we chose winding, scenic Route 7 in hope of finding more covered bridges. Sure enough, bridge



The Ticonderoga at the Shelburne Museum.



Autumn sunset on Lake Champlain.

number two was in the Charlotte area over Holmes Creek on the shore of Lake Champlain near a scenic lakeside picnic area. We also saw a handful of covered bridges from a distance as we drove south on Route 7 through beau-



Round Barn (circa 1901) houses the Visitor Centre at the Shelburne Museum.

tiful rolling terrain sprinkled with small villages and towns. Each little place seemed to have an antique shop, often with their wares spread out in the sunshine.

The next covered bridge we actually drove over was in the picturesque town of Woodstock on Route 4, said to



39 ft (approx 12 m) Lakeshore Bridge spanning Holmes Creek.

be the most photographed place in the state. With its numerous historic homes it's like a museum village come to life. The Woodstock covered bridge had a unique two lane design – one for pedestrians and one for vehicles. Just outside town, near the Lincoln Inn, we also found a green-roofed covered bridge built in 1877. In the mountain valley close to our overnight stop, we discovered one of the smallest covered bridges. Not much bigger than a garage it sat over a rushing mountain stream at the end of a private driveway. [Route #12 just north of Barnard.]

Being Canadian, and since this was an autumn road trip, we had pre-booked rooms at the Maple leaf Inn and were delighted with the result. As we sipped hot cider and munched Nancy's decadently delicious homemade cookies by the fireplace, innkeeper Mike Boyle gave us some insight into the Vermont covered bridges. Roofs were added not to shelter people and vehicles on the bridge but for protection of the expensive roadbed itself and its structural members. Covered bridges will last for 80 to 100 years compared to uncovered bridges, which begin to rot after only 18 to 20 years. They continue to be one of the most popular attractions in any region and Vermont folks feel fortunate to have so many – one hundred at last count. ■

IF YOU GO
 Vermont State Tourism
 A link to an excellent Covered Bridges site & fall colour info.
virtualvermont.com

Shelburne museum
 802.985.3346
shelburnemuseum.org

Vermont Wildflower Farm
 802.425.3641
 5 minutes south of Shelburne Museum on Route 7
vermontwildflowerfarm.com

Maple Leaf Inn
 800.51-MAPLE
mapleleafinn.com

For peak fall foliage season it is wise to book any inn or B&B at least a year in advance.