



Open Door To Autumn Splendor



*A sea of lead, a sky of slate;
Already autumn in the air, alas!*

- Arthur Symons

They say "nothing is certain except death and taxes." Here in the upper Midwest there is one other certainty — winter.

After Labor Day passes, we Midwesterners become fatalists. With each drop in temperature, with each falling leaf, we become a little more prepared for the inevitability of winter. And everyone seems to become an expert at predicting the severity of the inevitable. "Had a dry summer, we'll have a real snowy winter!" "Geese are flying south awfully early this year; gonna be a bad one this winter!" "We'll pay for that hot spell in July, just wait and see!"

But before these horrors attack, the most glorious of seasons occurs. It's a time of bright, crisp days; cold, clear nights; and an explosion of reds, yellows, oranges and golds throughout the forests. The fall colors peak in central Wisconsin in mid-October, and one of the most beautiful places to experience this event is on the Door peninsula.

It has been called "The Cape Cod of the Midwest," this rugged "thumb" of the state of Wisconsin with Lake Michigan on one side and Green Bay on the other. It had been 10 years since I had last visited Door County, and thanks to David Glass of D & M Corvette in Downers Grove, Illinois, I was able to return at the wheel of a beautiful 1974 Cor-

vette 454 coupe, resplendent, appropriately enough, in Bright Yellow paint.

In downtown Milwaukee, Interstate 94 out of Chicago meets I-43 North. While I'm not a great fan of interstate travel, once I-43 leaves the Milwaukee area it becomes one of the best I-system trips I've taken anywhere, surrounded by picturesque farms and rolling countryside and usually hugging Lake Michigan. An hour-and-a-half later, at Manitowoc, I exited I-43 and caught Wisconsin 42. It will be two-lane state highways the rest of the trip, again within sight of Lake Michigan most of the way. Highway 42 takes me through the pretty lakeshore towns of Manitowoc, Two Rivers, Kewaunee, and Algoma, each fine destinations in themselves.

At Algoma, Wisconsin 42 veers away from the lakeshore and heads straight north into southern Door County. It is an area usually overlooked by tourists on their way up the peninsula, a land of dairy farms built by Belgian settlers a century ago. A few miles north of Algoma the highway meets Wisconsin 57 coming from Green Bay and both enter the city of Sturgeon Bay, which is called "The Gateway to Door County."

Highways 57 and 42 split again north of Sturgeon Bay, with 57 following the lake side and 42 riding the bay. I followed the more populated bay side. About 20 miles north of Sturgeon Bay the traffic slowed to a bumper-to-bumper crawl as the town of Egg Harbor lies ahead. This is the high "leaf-peeper" season, and this village of 238 was overrun by tourists. Who can blame them? The fall colors were spectacular, the end-of-season bargains were hard to ignore,

*A Corvette
fall fling
in the
Midwest's
Cape Cod*

*text and
photography by
Thomas Glatch*



point of the town. An elderly Mrs. Halvorsen, serving as tour guide/town historian of Anderson's General Store, explained how, at the turn of the century, steamers carried Chicago's wealthy to Ephraim, where they would spend their summers at one of the many fine hotels there (for \$7.50 a week). The hotels are now bed and breakfasts, the famous graffiti-covered Anderson's Dock boat house now a gallery for local artists, the General Store now a museum, but the quiet grace of Ephraim — which means "Doubly Fruitful" — remains. Rev. Iverson named his Utopia wisely.

Continuing on through the towns of Sister Bay and Ellison Bay, I headed toward the tip of the peninsula. Highways 42 and 57 meet one last time before ending at Gills Rock. Here the drive becomes its most enjoyable, as traffic becomes almost non-existent, and as the road meanders up-and-down, left-and-right, through a series of sharp rolling hills known as moraines, I was amazed at the performance of this stock 1974 Corvette — the car clings smoothly and tenaciously to the undulating landscape, while powering out of the turns the LS4 454 propels the machine with the kind of down-low torque small-block owners could never experience (except perhaps in a 1992 LT1). Finally I reached the end of the road.

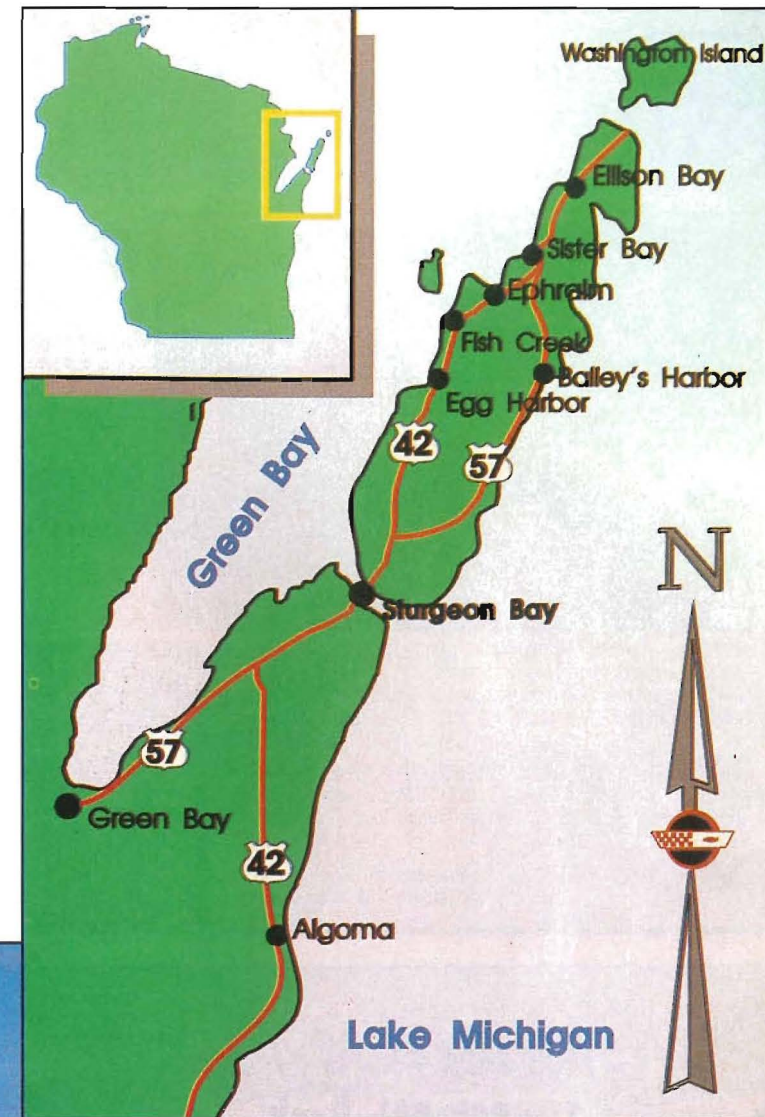
A ferry carries automobiles across the channel to Washington Island, like Door County's other villages and isles, a fine destination in itself. The first ship to sail Lake Michigan, explorer Robert La Salee's *Griffin*, landed here on September 18, 1679. Two centuries later pioneers from Iceland settled on the island, making this the nation's oldest Icelandic community. Modern navigation and shipbuilding have made the journey a safe one, but French settlers called this difficult passage *Porte des Mortes*, "Death's Door." In 1872

alone 100 vessels were lost or wrecked in this area. The peninsula and the county now bear its name.

It was getting late in the day, too late for a trip to the island. A group of Jaguars I encountered from the Wisconsin Chapter of the Jaguar Club of North America felt the same way. So I returned to Ellison Bay for dinner, the famous "Fish Boil" at The Viking Restaurant. Door County is filled with Scandinavian-based traditions, of which the fish boil is one. Outdoors, over a wood fire, in a large cast-iron kettle, fresh Lake Michigan whitefish, onions, and potatoes are boiled in water. At the right moment, the kettle master throws kerosene on the fire, which causes the kettle to boil over, taking with it the fat and oils from the fish. It's simple, tastes great, and is a must if you visit Door County.

Returning to Sturgeon Bay I went by way of Wisconsin 57 along Lake Michigan. This side of the peninsula is less populated, but not less interesting. The villages of Bailey's Harbor and Jacksonport, the beauty of Newport and Whitefish Dunes state parks, the lighthouse at Cana Island, and the rugged splendor of Cave Point County Park should not be missed. The sun had set and light was running out so I had to pass this and more for another time. Then again, my objective was to re-experience Door County, and even the short time I had on the peninsula was marvelously rejuvenating.

I spent the night with friends Frank and Marge Norris and their son, Mike, at their lakefront home overlooking Little Sturgeon Bay. After Sunday morning Mass I again explored the area in and around Sturgeon Bay. The city developed on the site of the narrowest point on the peninsula, a natural place of portage. The great French explorer, Father Claude Allouez, crossed what he called *La Portage*

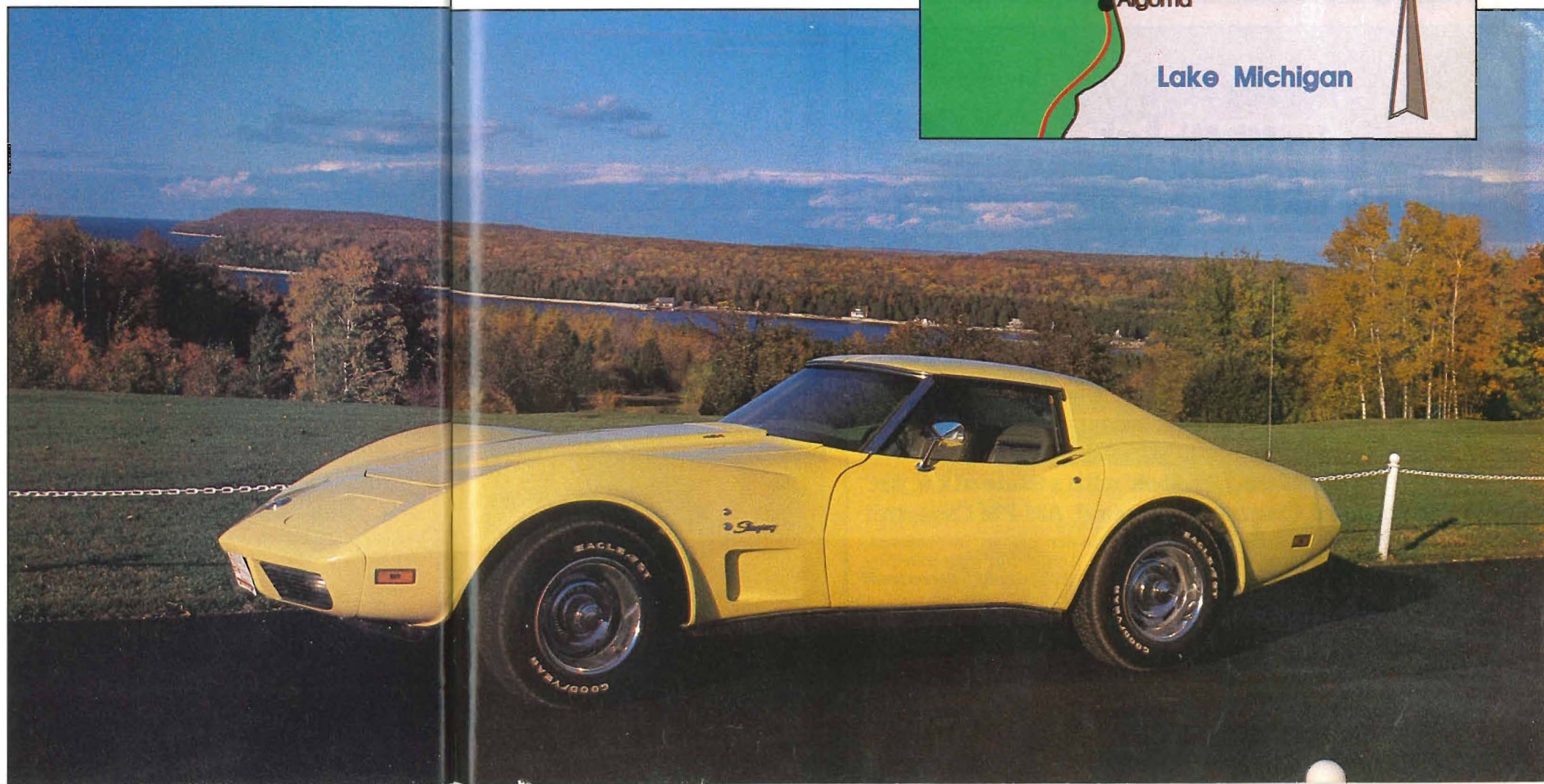


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the ambiance of genteel tranquility was invigorating despite the crowds. The town dates back to 1840 and it retains much of that old-fashioned charm. Even its name reflects that light-hearted time. One story claims that the Door's first white settler, Increase Clafin, found a nest of duck eggs on the side and called the place Egg Harbor. But another version recalled the mythic "Battle of the Eggs" of 1825 in which a group of fun-loving Green Bay men sailed into the harbor and promptly engaged in a classic egg fight! I will return someday, at a time when the area is less crowded.

A few miles further up Highway 42 the traffic slowed again to a standstill as I approached the town of Fish Creek. This weekend the village was hosting its annual "Pumpkin Patch Days," the last opportunity to visit the sights and take in the sales at the many shops in town before they close for the season. The beautiful village is certainly tempting. Founded in 1844 by Clafin, Fish Creek grew into a stopping point for Lake Michigan steamers and their wealthy passengers. Commercial fishing and cherry orchards are important businesses throughout the peninsula, but art galleries, craft and gift shops, fine eating establishments, "mom-and-pop" motels and bed and breakfast inns carry on the tourism tradition founded by the 19th century steamer trade. Despite the dependence on tourist dollars, Fish Creek and the whole of Door County are almost totally devoid of the franchise chains that can homogenize a place into just another look-alike tourist trap. That, and the natural beauty of this limestone peninsula explain the crowds on most weekends. But if I could do the trip over again, I would travel during the week, which is wise advice from mid-May to mid-October.

Heading away from Fish Creek the traffic decreased noticeably. Most of the sightseers were left behind, leaving my favorite Door County destination, the lovely village of Ephraim, much to myself. Ephraim is built on the cliffs overlooking a splendid harbor in a scene one might rather expect in New England. Without crowds to contend with, I parked the Corvette and began exploring on foot. It is easy to see why Rev. Andrew Iverson, leaving his native Norway for the freedom of America, would settle his community of Moravian Church believers at this site in 1853. The Moravians were noted not just for their religious fervor but also for their skills in carpentry, and the village they built reflects their elegance and pride. That may explain the town's more "conservative" air compared to the "trendy" image of Egg Harbor and Fish Creek. The dock and general store, built in 1858 by Aaslag Anderson, remains a focal





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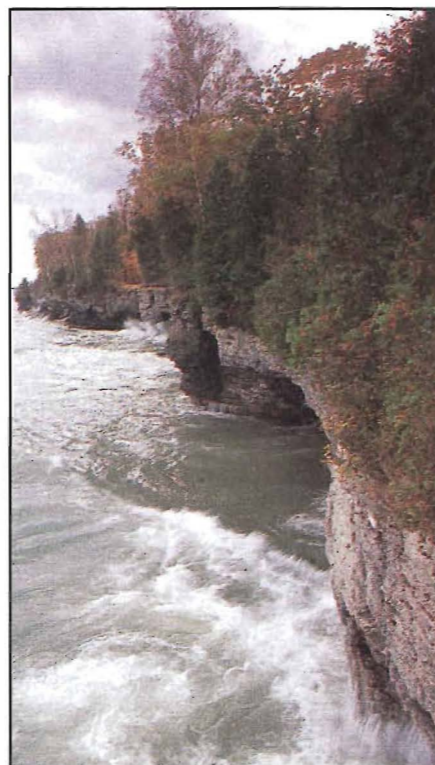
des Eturgeons in 1677, forever giving the place its name, and saving 100 miles over a trip around "Death's Door." Oliver Perry Graham built a home at this site in 1850, where a town soon began to flourish. In 1878 a channel was dug connecting Lake Michigan and Green Bay, eliminating the need to portage and making it a natural center for commerce and industry. Today on this channel Petersen Builders, Inc., constructs boats for the Navy and commercial uses. Next door, Palmer Johnson builds expensive custom aluminum yachts. Sturgeon Bay is the home of many commercial fishing boats, and the port-of-call for hundreds of pleasure craft during the season.

Now in mid-October, there were still some boats in the harbor, although many more were already in dry-dock at Palmer Johnson and Petersen Builders. While most boating enthusiasts were through for the year, Corvette owners were still traveling in full force. Over the weekend I lost count of the number of Corvettes I encountered, quite a few from out of state. Many of their drivers smiled and waved, obviously sharing in the camaraderie of this autumn experience. Yes, we all were enjoying our one final fling of the year.

Sunday afternoon it was time to return home, but not before I removed the T-tops one last time. I hear it's going to be a long, cold winter, you know.

CF

—Thomas Glatch is a free-lance automotive writer and photographer from Milwaukee. He is a frequent contributor to Corvette Fever.



Places To Go, People To See, Things To Do

Door County is home to many fine activities and establishments. Here is a selection:

HISTORIC BED & BREAKFASTS

Scofield House, 809 Michigan, Sturgeon Bay, WI 54235; 414-743-7727
Whistling Swan, 4129 Main St., Fish Creek, WI 54212; 414-868-3442
White Gull Inn, 4225 Main St., Fish Creek; 414-868-3517
White Lace Inn, 16 North 5th Ave., Sturgeon Bay; 414-743-1105

MUSEUMS

Door County Marine Museum, Sunset Park, Sturgeon Bay; 414-743-8139
Door County Maritime Museum, 12590 Hwy. 42, Ellison Bay; 414-854-2860
Jacobsen's Museum, Little Lake Road, Washington Island, WI 54246; 414-847-2213
Miller Art Museum, 107 S. 4th Ave., Sturgeon Bay; 414-743-6578
Washington Island Museum, Little Lake Rd., Washington Island; 414-847-2213

RESTAURANTS

Al Johnson's Swedish Restaurant, Hwy. 42, Sister Bay, WI 54234; 414-854-2626
Kortes' English Inn, 3713 Hwy. 42, Fish Creek; 414-868-3076
The Viking Restaurant, 12029 Hwy. 42, Ellison Bay, WI 54210; 414-854-2998
White Gull Inn, 4225 Main St., Fish Creek; 414-868-3517

GALLERIES

Edgewood Orchard Galleries, Peninsula Players Rd., Fish Creek; 414-868-3579
Jack Anderson Art Gallery, Meadow Ln., Sister Bay; 414-854-5161
Joan Champeau Pioneer Gallery, 607 Bay Shore Dr., Sister Bay; 414-854-2770

STATE PARKS

Newport State Park, Ellison Bay (camping, hiking, fishing, picnicking); 414-854-2500
Potawatomi State Park, S. of Sturgeon Bay (camping, hiking, boating, fishing, picnicking); 414-743-8869 or -8860
Peninsula State Park, Fish Creek (camping, hiking, boating, fishing, golf, tennis, nature programs, picnicking); 414-868-3258
Rock Island State Park, off Washington Island (camping, hiking, boating, boat rental, horseback riding, fishing, picnicking); 414-847-2235
Whitefish Dunes State Park, N. of Sturgeon Bay (hiking, fishing, picnicking); 414-823-2400

OTHER

Wisconsin Department of Tourism
123 W. Washington Ave.
Box 7606
Madison, WI 53707
608-266-2161
800-432-TRIP
Road Conditions: 800-ROAD-WIS
Door County Chamber of Commerce
P.O. Box 406W
Sturgeon Bay, WI 54235
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