

Fall Foliage in Southern Vermont

by Photographer Raymond Klass

Southern Vermont is one of my favorite fall foliage locations. Its unique blend of rolling streams, mountain peaks, and pristine lakes offer photographers a wide range of subjects without much driving. Because of the change in elevation between the valley floor and the higher Green Mountain National Forest, fall foliage is usually just about peak color at one location or another. In a good year, the foliage here can last 2-3 weeks or more at near peak conditions simply by driving a couple miles either north or south.

More specifically, the area of Southern Vermont I'm talking about stretches north to Stratton, and south to Bennington, and encompasses about 40 miles or so of scenic beauty in various state parks and the Green Mountain National Forest. What makes this area special, beyond the diversity of scenic locations, is that many of them are very accessible. This is a great place to simply park the car and walk across the road for your shot. By no means is it necessary to hike miles, or canoe across lakes, to get a great shot. The various park services have built roads and easy, flat trails for much of the area. Of course that's not to say that there isn't great hiking if that's your fancy, just that it isn't necessary to get a good shot.

Not only are there many great locations to shoot at, but often I have trouble leaving my first location of the day. From reflections to waterfalls, to macros, and sometimes wildlife, the possibilities at each location are almost endless. I like to take all my lenses with me, leaving some in the car, "just in case".



Weather during the peak of the foliage season, early to mid October, ranges from blustery cold mornings around freezing, to warm afternoons in the mid 60s, Fahrenheit. Sunny days are great to photograph some of the 100 plus mile viewpoints, like Hogback Mountain, while cloudy or drizzling days are great for the meandering streams along Stratton-Arlington road, which cuts through the Green Mountains National Forest. Make sure to



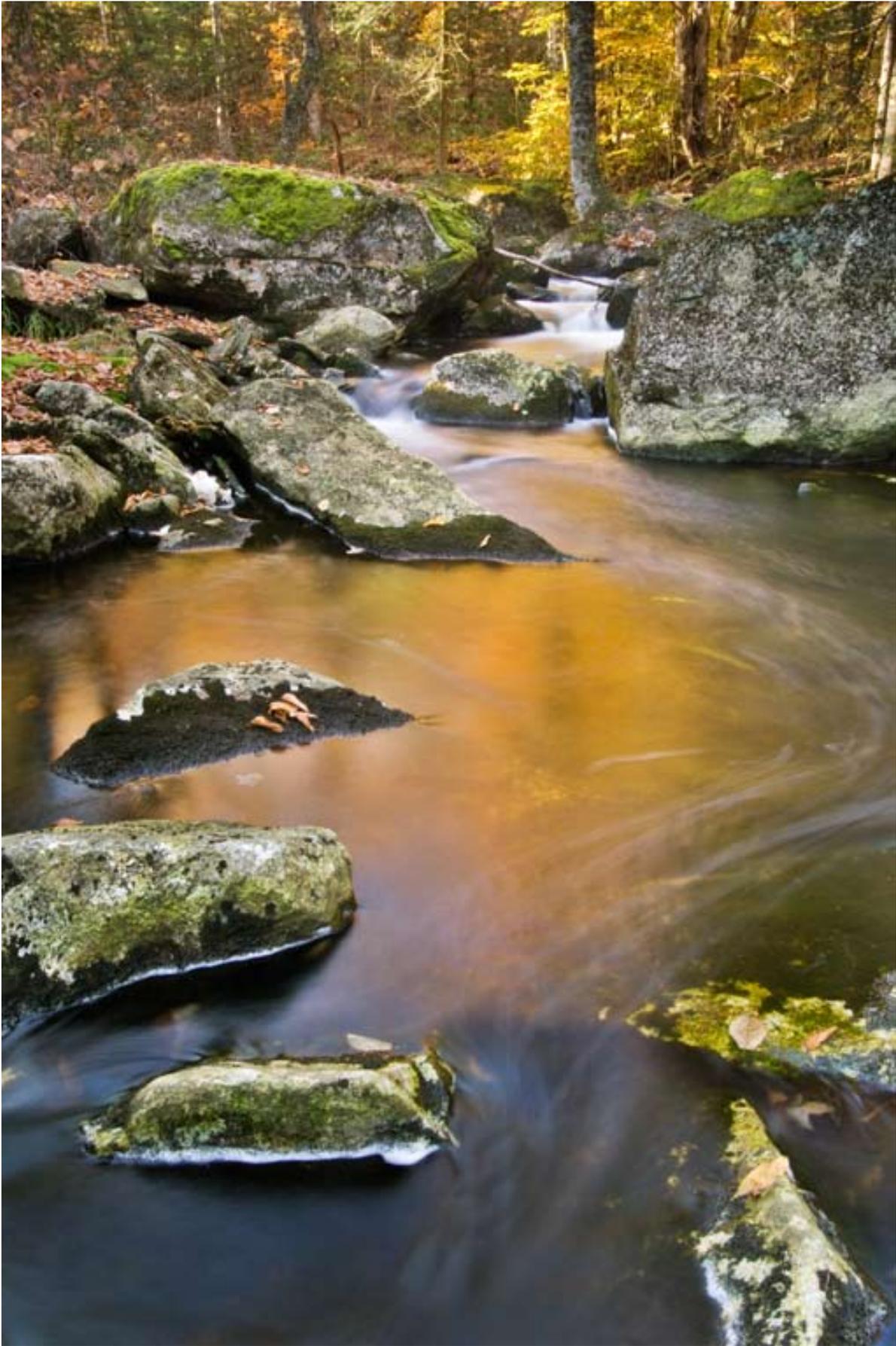
bring layers and be prepared for sudden changes, as the weather can be unpredictable this time of year.

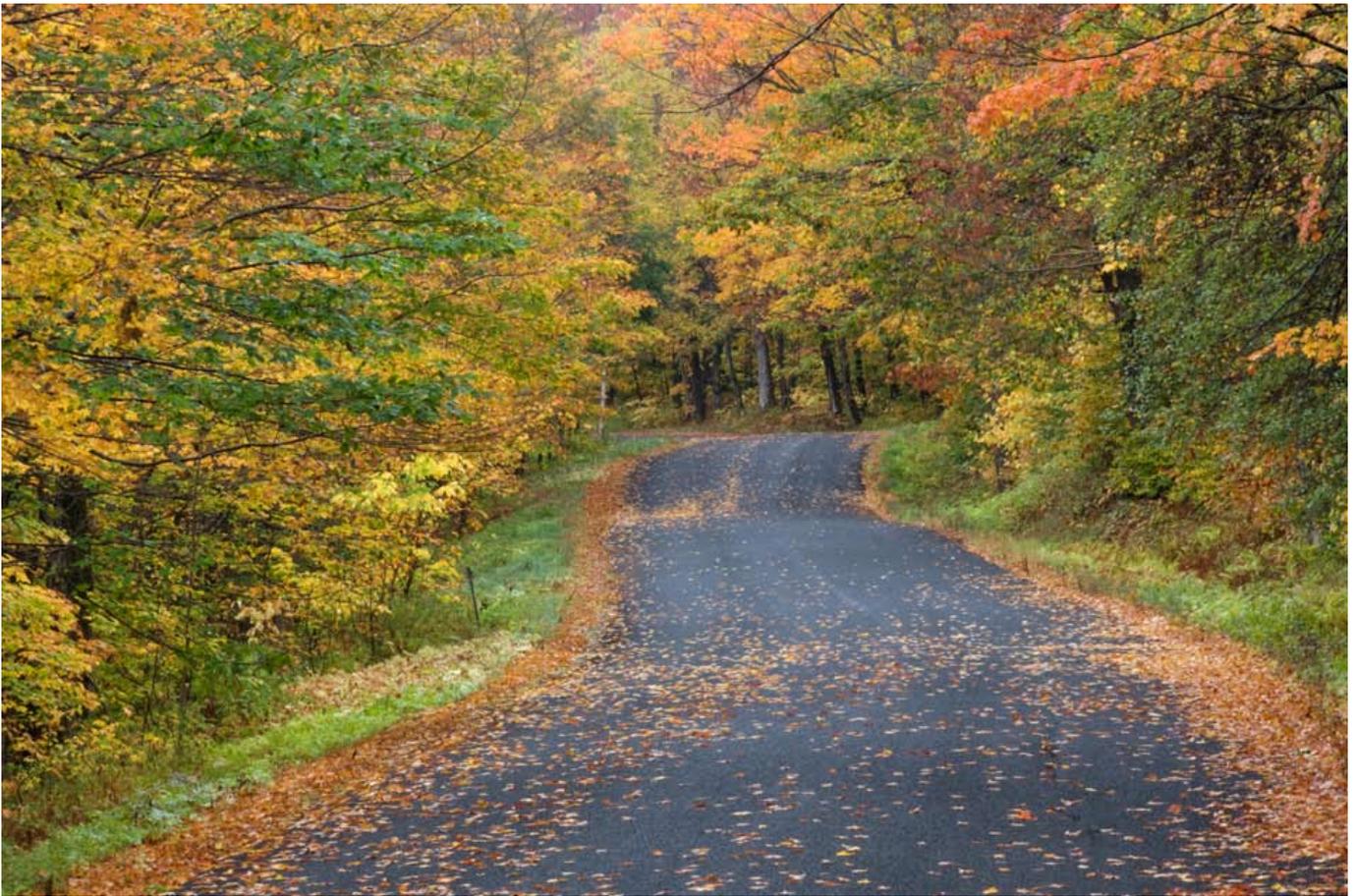
Weekends can be a bit crowded during the peak season, as local businesses cater specifically to the “leaf peepers”, so I try to avoid the main towns of Bennington and Wilmington during the weekend, opting to simply explore some of the dirt roads near the less populated East Dover area. I’ve found some of my nicest fence, barn, and road shots while just driving around, avoiding the weekend rush.

Weekdays, if you have the opportunity, are the absolute best time to be out with a camera. Most of the locations have very few, if any, tourists, and if you’re up at sunrise, you’ll likely be the only person there. Also, the local hotels and B&Bs often offer discounts and incentives to stay during the week, so you’ll also be paying less to stay there too.

I would start photographing in this area by getting a good quality Southern Vermont map – or better yet, a map of Bennington and Windham counties, which will likely have more details on the local roads. A car GPS system is also a good idea, though there are likely to be some roads that the GPS will not recognize, as much of the more rural areas are not paved or named. I like to carry a map in my car, and use a pen or pencil to mark down areas that I might return to. Much of the area is good “car-side photography”, and the best way to orient yourself to the sight, sounds, and smells is to simply lose yourself on the back-roads of Vermont. One of the nice features of having a GPS is that it can always point you back to your starting point, so if you really do lose yourself, you’ll be able to find your way back.

There are some great advantages to working and exploring from your car. Once you leave





the pavement, you are likely to be only person photographing – and some of the most authentically New England scenes are to be found down these winding dirt roads. I should say that while the roads aren't paved, most are very well maintained, as they are still main arteries of travel for the Vermonters living there. I drive a 1991 Mitsubishi sedan – by no means a high clearance 4 wheel drive, and I've never gotten stuck on any of the roads. All you need to start exploring is a desire to see, and some common sense.

While you're out shooting, it is helpful to think about interpreting your subject in a multitude of ways. From wide-angle views, to telephoto, and with close-up equipment, often there's not one single "best" image, but any number of ways that a successful image can be made. While I'm out in the field, I force myself to "try" these different perspectives – often it's what makes my trips successful year after year. That way I'm not re-taking the same photos over and over again.

Southern Vermont is easily accessible from the New York City area, Boston area, and is pretty central to most of the Northeast. It is about a 3 ½ drive from the New York City and Northern New Jersey area, most of which is on major interstates. Lodging and food is easy to find in either the Wilmington or Bennington area. My favorite Bed and Breakfast is run by Charles and Lee Wheeler and is located just outside Wilmington in East Dover. They're great to work with, and Lee is an incredible cook and photography enthusiast who loves to have photographers staying at her Bed and Breakfast. They're website is <http://www.cooperhillinn.com>

Vermont is a great place to spend fall. Photographically, it's a rich combination of small town, classic New England landscapes, and the incredible wildness of the Green Mountain National Forest. Come well prepared, and the hardest part of your trip will be leaving it behind.

