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Northern Michigan

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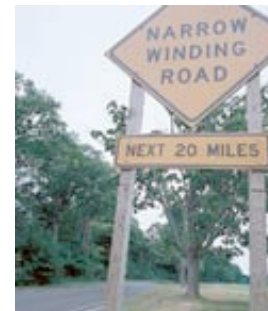
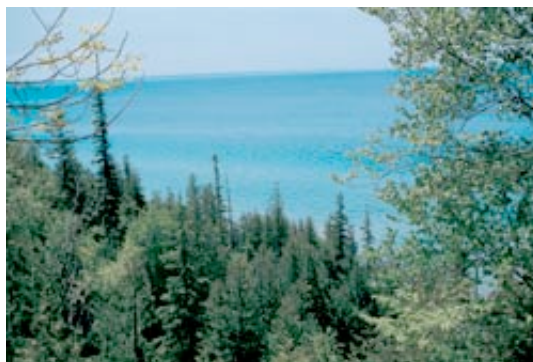
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Sacred Ground

Tour M-119's tunnel of trees and find a land rich in beauty and Native legend.

By Julie Musilek Photography by Leigh Patton



Make it a Day Trip

Before embarking on an automotive excursion down M-119, fuel up at The Island Bean Coffee Company, a renovated 1930s brick gas station on Main Street in Harbor Springs. Grab muffins, coffeecakes, or bagels and your favorite caffeinated delight at this favorite local hangout. 231-526-9998. On your return to Harbor Springs, cool off with a cone from Kilwin's.

Drop off any weary travelers only two miles north of Harbor Springs at the Harbor Point Golf Club on M-119. All are welcome to tee off for 18 holes of relaxing golf after 1:30 p.m. The club also offers dining. 231-526-2951.

The snaking curves of M-119 between Harbor Springs and Cross Village are famous for the reaching trees that interlock limbs across miles of narrow, winding road. But this stretch, nicknamed the "Tunnel of Trees," is more than just a gorgeous drive. Behind the scenery lies a Native American legacy--the unspoiled land surrounding the route is rich in Native lore, and scattered sites of interest along the way tell the stories of Emmet County's original inhabitants.



Explore the vistas and the legends with a kicked-back cruise down this 20-mile stretch. Rule No. 1: take it easy--the 45-mph speed limit is no joke. If you stop and take a closer look, you'll see bumps and bruises on many trees

where drivers misjudged the distance between their cars and the wall of forest.

Your itinerary starts out on Lower Shore Drive, which begins approximately 2.5 miles north of Harbor Springs off M-119 directly across from Birchwood Farms. Lower Shore Drive provides an alternate pathway on the way to Cross Village so you can take a different route back, maximizing the afternoon's viewing potential.



The first stop is the Thorne Swift Nature Preserve, half a mile down Lower Shore Drive (231-526-6401). The preserve protects the natural diversity of a mother lode of giant trees more than a century old. According to Native American historian and Odawa tribe member Wes Andrews, the land in this preserve is also home to an elusive water spirit. Native legend has it the water spirit enters and exits through the cedar swamp, creating storms, taking people for rides around the lake, and in less playful moments, stealing children.

Roughly two miles past the preserve on Lower Shore Drive is a second landmark and an opportunity to hike around: a Jesuit mission church built in 1889 named Middle Village, or Ah-pi-tah-wa-ing. The surrounding crosses mark graves of tribe members. The path to the right of the church leads down to Middle Village Park, inviting the public to indulge in a white sand beach shouldering the aqua blue water of Lake Michigan. Those toting a pup should grab a Frisbee, because canines are welcome to join in the sun fun.



Shortly after the Middle Village church, Lower Shore Drive reconnects with M-119 in the town of Good Hart, or Ka-

mi-no-te-a. The Good Hart General Store offers a warm welcome and much needed refreshments, so grab a snack and cool off from the day's activities.

Hop back on M-119 and continue north. Two miles south of Cross Village, you'll find the Washout--a ravine that Andrews says was created following a battle between the Thunderbirds, or sky beings, and the underwater spirits. These underwater spirits tried to escape from their watery dwelling place, so the Thunderbirds took the form of lightning and struck down the underwater spirits. As the lightning hit ground, it gouged out the huge ravine before us today. On the south side of the ravine resides the only remaining white pine of the historic Circle of Council Trees. Among the trees, Native Americans and British signed an alliance against the United States in the late 1700s.

Our tour soon leads to where the Tunnel of Trees opens up into the tiny town of Cross Village, an ancient Odawa settlement where small-town hospitality and distinctive antique store shopping thrive. The first sign of civilization in Cross Village is the legendary Legs Inn, a giant log lodge overlooking Lake Michigan. It's filled with hand carved log furniture and is known for--ready?



--Polish cuisine. The unusual blend of Old-World Europe and Native cultures provides the perfect quirk factor for an afternoon of legend chasing.

Finish the tour by heading south on M-119 where, just past Middle Village, there is a U-shaped curve named Devil's Elbow. The name stemmed from a series of strange, unexplained occurrences in the area, but it's a bit of a misinterpretation--the original Odawa name means "where the spirits reside." And according to some, that's still true today.

Julie Musilek was an intern with TRAVERSE.

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