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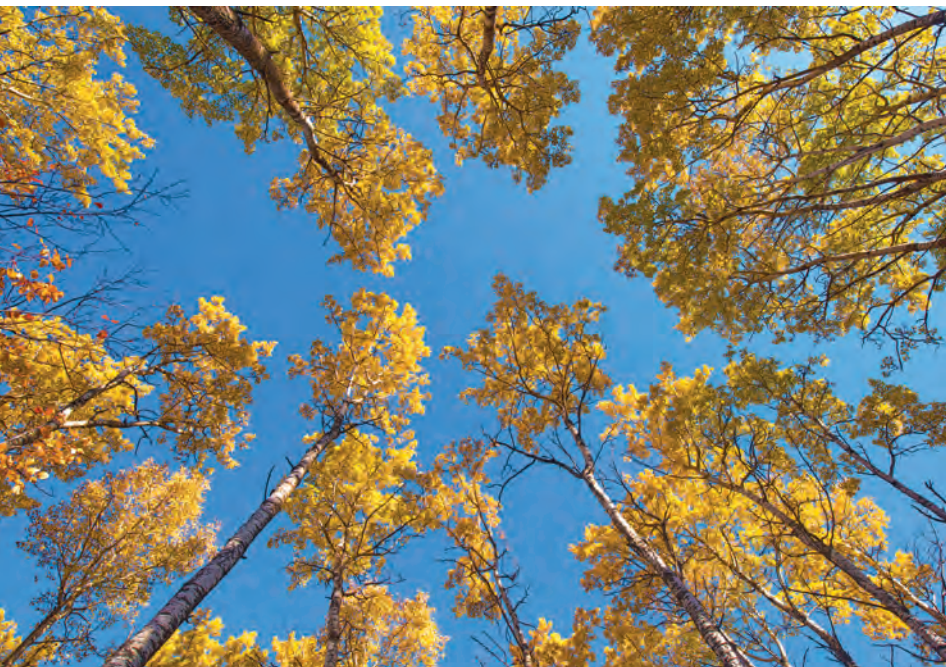
Photographing Saskatchewan's Fabulous Fall Colours



If you like photographing the splendour of autumn, it's hard to beat a drive around Saskatchewan. Variety is the key: boreal forest galore, aspen parkland awash in golden tones, and prairie coulees serving up dazzling displays with an amazing palette of colours.

Story
& photos by

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Duck Mountain Provincial Park has some of the most southerly boreal forest in Saskatchewan. For fall, the Ski Hill Road tops our list. It runs from near the park's core area south to Little Boggy Creek, descending into the valley and offering panoramic vistas over the hills. More great views abound nearby. Head south on Highway 5, then explore the backroads between Runnymede and the park, with high vantage points along the hilly terrain.

While in Saskatchewan's far east, check out Woody Lake Road in the Porcupine Hills. The northern end starts east of Hudson Bay and passes a series of picture-perfect small lakes with a backdrop of thick forest. Don't miss the fall highlights along the four-kilometre uphill road from Townsend Lake to Spirit Lake. The last time we did this stretch, we enjoyed some of the best colours of the trip. For unparalleled sweeping views, stop at Brockelbank Hill near the northern end of the Woody Lake Road. From the summit the road quickly descends 365 metres to the Little Armit River Valley.

The eastern forests are also the best bet for adding red to the forest scene. Mountain Maple found mainly in the eastern reaches of the province, such as in the Pasquia Hills north of Hudson Bay, can turn brilliant red.



Any of the other forested provincial parks offer up a range of fall grandeur, such as Meadow Lake, Greenwater, or Lac La Ronge, though our top choice would be Narrow Hills. The aptly named Narrow Hills Scenic Drive starts at the park's core area at Lower Fishing Lake and climbs a push moraine to a lookout over the Grace Lakes. Just 10 kilometres long, it packs a lot into a short drive, with bird's-eye views over the expansive forest and lakes. Beautiful anytime, this area in autumn can be magnificent.

Highway 913 runs across the northern end of Narrow Hills Provincial Park, with a series of vantage points from its numerous hills. It also provides access to the Gem Lakes, another must-visit. A network of hiking trails takes you around the five tiny lakes named after gemstones: Jade, Diamond, Opal, Pearl, and Sapphire. The top viewpoint is conveniently close to the trailhead, along a high hill between Jade and Diamond Lakes.



Fall Photography

Prince Albert National Park is an essential part of any fall colour odyssey. Since it's located in a transition zone between aspen parkland and boreal forest, the variety of vegetation adds more possibilities. Drive along the southern stretch of Highway 263 near the turnoff to Sandy Lake where the hilly road looks over mostly deciduous forest. Farther north, such as along the shore of Waskesiu Lake or the Kingsmere Road, we find more evergreen trees and a melding of green and gold. To enjoy a closer look at the colours, walk some of the park's many trails such as Boundary Bog, where tamaracks turn a deep gold.



We don't always need big trees. Prairie creeks and coulees put on some incredible shows, with the wide array of shrubs and other vegetation often more spectacular than the forest. Grasslands National Park is an obvious choice, as are the parks around Lake Diefenbaker. Among our favourites is Saskatchewan Landing Provincial Park, with beautiful hikes along forested ravines, grasslands, and rolling hills, and the added dimension of the lake as a backdrop.

The Cypress Hills are different again, with a unique mix of lodgepole pine forest, high hills, and open grasslands, giving us the best of all worlds. Aspen trees can be decked out in every shade from golden yellow to deep orange. Fall displays in the south often last longer; even around Thanksgiving Day we found colours at their peak.



Autumn drives in the countryside can be rewarding as well. The Qu'Appelle Valley stands out, where forested banks mix with grassland coulees. In the aspen parklands, we especially like roads through the Thickwood Hills, northeast of the Battlefords around tiny communities such as Whitkow, Mayfair, and Rabbit Lake. Try Highway 378 between the Battlefords and Rabbit Lake, or Grid Road 750 east of Whitkow. The mix of gently rolling hills, farmland, wetlands, and sizable pockets of forest is so attractive at this time of year that you can usually pick a road at random and not be disappointed.



No matter where you go, try to adapt your photography to light conditions. A sunny sky will light up that grand scene, but don't put your camera away when it turns overcast. These are ideal conditions for close-ups or photographing under the forest canopy. Sunshine brings extremes of bright and dark to the forest floor, which makes photography challenging. Clouds act as a giant light diffuser, evening out the shadows and highlights so that we can more easily capture the range of details. However, cloudy weather often makes the sky an unattractive greyish-white. Try to minimize the amount of sky in the photo in these cases or, better yet, eliminate it entirely. As in any type of photography, if an element doesn't add to the image, or is distracting, then it's best to leave it out.

While we instinctively look up at trees for fall colours, don't forget to also look down. Fallen leaves or frost patterns on plants can make photos just as compelling as a grand scene. Our favourite places for top-down photography are from viewing towers, such as at Humphrey Lake in Meadow Lake Provincial Park, along the Marean Lake Birding Trail in Greenwater Provincial Park, and along the Spruce River Highlands Trail and the Height of Land tower in Prince Albert National Park.

