

20 Questions and along the shores of Lake Ontario

> STORY & PHOTOS BY GEOFF KELLY

US Route 20, the longest highway in the country, runs from Newport, Oregon, just a mile from the Pacific Ocean, to Kenmore Square in Boston, Massachusetts. The 400-mile stretch that traverses New York State is mostly scenic, two-lane highways, descended from the first great western turnpikes and, before those, well-worn Native American trails. Until the New York State Thruway opened between 1954 and 1956, it was the most frequented cross-state route; today the decline in traffic is evident in the darkened windows and weed-tangled lots of abandoned motels.

Plenty are still open, of course: the Star-Lite Motel in Seneca Falls, the Chanticleer Motor Lodge in Canandaigua, the Cresthill Motel near Waterloo, birthplace of Memorial Day, whose handpainted sign advertises a permanent vacancy. These are supported by tourists who travel Route 20 in the summer to visit the Finger Lakes, to go antiquing, to tour wineries, to visit historic sites, to patronize farm stands, to see the countryside.

That's what we aimed to do, heading east toward the Finger Lakes on a sunny Saturday morning to see what we would see. We set out eastbound from Buffalo on Route 20, aiming toward Auburn, New York, just past Seneca Falls. Then northward on backroads to Sodus Bay, a quaint beach town with two lighthouses—one that works and one that's a museum. Then homeward on the Seaway Trail, along the southern shore of Lake Ontario.

We hied out of town on Broadway, stopping first at the R & L Tavern on Mill Street, just past the Broadway Market, for coffee and cheese pierogi. Lotte—the “L” in the tavern's name—showed us a suitcase filled with Polish newsweeklies from 1932; the cover photo for the issue on top of the pile was Benito Mussolini. She speaks Polish but doesn't read it as well as her husband, Roland—the “R”—who came to the US at age seven, after he was freed from a Nazi concentration camp. But she thought they might be valuable. I agreed.

“Where did you find these?” I said.

“I don't want to say,” Lotte replied. “If they find out they're worth something, they'll want a cut.”

She used to go driving, too, she told us, when she learned of our plans. All the way out to the Finger Lakes, just to get out of town. When she was younger.



A carved bull in a yard full of wood sculptures on a country road between Auburn, New York and Lake Ontario. The sculptor's wife said he'd seen similar sculptures in Rochester and liked them so much he was inspired to teach himself.

Signs along the way

A half hour east of R & L, we sprung free of Buffalo's suburbs and into farm country. Add a few words and a catalog of the road signs along the way read like a poem:

“Here we go gathering gifts in May.”

Like Pharaoh's Treasures;

like the Alden Memorial Day BBQ: noon 'til gone.

Like a token for Sergeant Todd Travis:

Welcome Home from His Third Tour in Iraq.

Elk Meat For Sale *down the street from 3 Bucks Country Store.*

Or maybe a gift certificate to Tom Wahl's:

Free W-Fi: Woo Hoo!

The Western New York Steam & Gas Association *confers with*

the New York Steam Engine Association *on neutral ground:*

The Jack 'n' Jill Inn—Spaghetti Our Specialty since 1947.



Meanwhile, at the Davis Trailer World & Country Mall,

a Caledonian exhales a long stream of smoke and sighs:

Too bad Dave's not here.

LIMA BANK ROBBED: This vault was in the “Bank of Lima” at the time of the first bank robbery in Livingston County. February 8, 1915.

If you are tempted to stray

by Lima's “Wizard of Clay”

Stay the course; stay.

It's another Dead End.

Not far from Darien Lake—just down the street from the Miller Elk Farm, in fact—there is a plaque commemorating Mina Griswold, the state's first female rural mail carrier.

For miles on either side of Lima, a battle between neighbors is playing out in the form of yard signs: “WalMart YES” in green and white vs. “Never in Lima” next to a yellow Walmart happy face logo turned into a sourpuss. East of Lima, in the farm country, the ayes have it. But as we drove closer to town and then along the Main Street—by the historic American Hotel, built in 1861, by Aunt Denise's Donut Den and, down the block, Uncle Dave's Upper Deck tavern—the trickle of anti-Walmart sentiment turned into a flood.

Final count for Walmart: seven households. Final count against Walmart: I stopped counting at 20.

The summer crowd

On Lakeshore Drive in Canandaigua—from the Iroquois *Kanandarque*, which means “Chosen Spot,” population 11,264 year-round and many more in the summer time—is an ice cream stand named Scoops, where the high school girls behind the counter don't wear hair-nets or baseball hats and no one seems to mind that their long, shiny locks brush the tops of every ice cream cone they serve.

Scoops is right on the marina, across from a pleasant lakeside park, where couples sit on benches to watch the sun set. Not far across the water is Squaw Island, New York's smallest state park. It's about the size of a football field.

One of the girls at Scoops has to dress like

The male elk at Miller Elk Farm on Route 20, not far from Darien Lake—and not far from a memorial to Mina Griswold, the state's first female rural mail carrier. Also nearby is the Darien Country Store, a great place to buy a lampshade.

a clown and stand in the boulevard with a sign, drumming up business, directing the slow-cruising summer traffic toward the parking lot. For hours at a time. The girls take turns.

“Okay, I guess,” said the girl taking her turn on Memorial Day weekend, the first busy weekend of the summer season, when we asked how she was holding up. “Someone threw an egg at me.”

She pointed a few yards away, where a broken egg streaked the pavement. “See it?”

Towns like Canandaigua, with its beautiful waterfront, and Seneca Falls, with its Women's Rights National Historic Park, its Seneca Waterways and Industry Museum and its Mary Baker Eddy Library, were filling up with tourists. We recognized them: They looked like us. We had planned to stay overnight in Seneca Falls but thought maybe the town had enough visitors.

Plus the manager of the Star-Lite Motel—a great name but a rundown joint—wanted \$65 for one of his crummy rooms. “After Memorial Day rate,” he told me.

“But Memorial Day is Monday. It's Saturday,” I said.

“I only have five rooms left and the day's not over yet,” he replied.

No bargaining room there, so we pressed on to Auburn, Central New York's home of the derby: the 68th Annual All-American Soap Box Derby, which finished just hours before we arrived; the Annual Memorial Day Duck Derby, which we missed by a day in the other direction; the 25th Annual Finger Lakes Carp Derby, hosted by the Grumpy Ol' Men's Club, \$2,000 in prizes—well, no, that was back in Seneca Falls.

William and Harriet

In Auburn we took a room at the Budget Inn, where we refrigerated the fresh asparagus we'd bought on the honor system from an unmanned farm stand earlier in the day. We watched a Grateful Dead cover band at a pub called Spirits and ate a pizza around midnight at the corner of the crowded bar at Mark's Pizzeria. In the



The historic town of Conquest, New York, north of the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, is just five miles down the road from the slightly less historic town of Victory, New York.

morning we read the paper at a beautiful old diner on Genesee Street, overlooking the Genesee River, site of the Duck Derby, channeled through town between 20-foot concrete walls. The eggs and home fries were terrible, but the service was friendly and informative: The waitress gave us directions to the home of Harriet Tubman, a mile or so out of town.

Tubman, born into slavery in Maryland in 1820, escaped her chains in 1849 and proceeded to lead hundreds more African-American slaves to freedom, becoming the most celebrated leader of the Underground Railroad. In all she made 18 or 19 trips to the South and back. She first came to Auburn in 1857, when she helped her parents to escape. She settled in Auburn with them.

She served as a nurse, a scout and a spy for the Union Army during the Civil War. When the fighting ended, she was convinced by William H. Seward—the US secretary of state who orchestrated the 1867 purchase of Alaska from Russia, famously dubbed Seward's Folly—to return to Auburn, which was his hometown, too. She spent her years there fighting the federal government for a military pension, in recognition of her service during the war. It was finally granted to her posthumously, which is really too polite an adverb—it was granted in 2003, 90 years after her death.

Her house is small, quaint and ill kept—it and the surrounding park and museum were closed when we arrived, but we walked the grounds and peeked in the windows. The paint was peeling and the clapboard was cracked. By contrast, we'd passed Seward's house, also a museum now, on the way out of town: a sprawling brick mansion on immaculate grounds, beautifully maintained. The only nicer building in town was the Methodist church.

We gathered some purple phlox to perfume the car and turned northward, leaving Route 20 behind.

The in-between roads to the water

Here, between Route 20 and Route 104, a constituent of the Seaway Trail, we lost ourselves in a lotus land of country lanes and sunny farms, the road rising and fall-

ing into towns with names like Victory and Conquest. We stopped at a tiny roadside cemetery and read the intertwined histories of two families; we stopped to stare at some alpacas in a paddock; the air was filled with silky wisps and seedlings.

Looking for water to keep the phlox alive, we rattled across a wood-tracked, one-lane bridge and down into a river-flat community of fishing shacks nestled under a canopy of maple, oak and poplar. The road ended in a copse of trees, under which grazed a flock of goats.

At the crossroads was a gas station/general store/diner, where everyone had ordered the special and half the diners where dressed in Sunday churchgoing clothes. The strawberry-rhubarb pie, said the cook, came from a bakery in Syracuse. "Most of the restaurants around here get their pies from the same place," she told us. "But we only have pecan left." We bought rhubarb bread at a roadside stand outside of Sodus Point instead, after a brief visit to the the mysteriously named Chimney Bluffs—a wall of red clay cliffs facing north toward Canada, which resemble chimneys not at all.

At Sodus Bay we changed into swimwear in the vestibule of the public restrooms, which were still locked for the season. Children were splashing in the waves, oblivious to the icy water; we lasted about two minutes.

The Seaway Trail is a 454-mile scenic route paralleling Lake Erie, the Niagara River, Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. After leaving Sodus Point, we passed through a chain of lakefront villages and one nuclear power plant before descending into Rochester's Irondequoit Bay, where we struggled to follow the green signs designating the trail—a time-eating diversion. When we finally emerged from the metropolitan slough, the road wound through lush parkland. Before we turned away from the water onto Route 98, inland to Albion, we stopped for a beer at the Black North Inn in Kent, where a few dozen bikers had chosen to end their Sunday rides. They stood around the parking lot and boat ramp in leathers and boots and shades, drinking beer and debating whether to make one more stop—somewhere along the Erie Canal, maybe in Middleport, maybe in Albion. One more stop on the way home, just one more drink, stretch out the day a few more hours.

Not for us, not today. Time to go home. **av**

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A leisurely stroll down the claustrophobic and somewhat muddy "streets" of Little Rock City. This is Wall Street, one of the longer passages.

When this road trip was first hatched, two things were obvious: We were going to Amish country, and we were getting there by way of one of my favorite roads, US Route 62. Stretching for nearly 2,300 miles from Niagara Falls to El Paso, Texas, 62 is one of America's great roads. At least it's great in my mind. Having grown up in a small town along Route 62, that road became my window to the outside world and excited my imagination. As if by magic, the road regularly produced Amish buggies, motorcycle gangs, farmers on great tractors, pre-fab houses on their way to becoming homes and, of course, freighter trucks, countless rumbling freighter trucks.

To some degree that's all changed. Fewer trucks use the old highways these days, unless it's for local deliveries. When Eisenhower passed the Interstate Highway Act in 1956 in the name of national defense, he fundamentally changed the way Americans travel. Now most folks tend to get around on nondescript superhighways, blazing across the countryside and never getting a feel for the places they are whizzing past.

That's what we desperately wanted to avoid on this trip, and 62 was the answer to our concrete-and-styrofoam blues. Though it may not have its former glory, 62 still holds as much magic as the stormy day in 1986 when a rain-swollen Thatcher Brook spilled over its banks, and an adventurous pair paddled a whitewater raft past my house on the flooded road.

Kazoo blues

And so we set out on a recent Saturday morning, with an unsure forecast and a less sure plan. All we knew was we wanted a rural exploration, and as such we passed up a smattering of otherwise worthwhile stops in South Buffalo, Lackawanna and Bladell: South Park's botanical gardens, the soaring copper domes of Our Lady of Victory Basilica and Ilio DiPaolo's Restaurant and Ringside Lounge, the eatery dedicated to the former wrestling champion. But these places had the smack of the familiar, and we wanted to look at the country with fresh eyes.

Hamburg is the last point south that can truly be considered a suburb of Buffalo, and as we rolled past the thinning houses of Water Valley,

roadtrip

Gowanda and points south

Americana at its best

> STORY & PHOTOS BY PETER KOCH

the land opened up into freshly planted cornfields that lined both sides of the road. This is corn country, to be sure: The Eden Valley Growers Co-op easily grows more than three million ears of corn each year, and Eden hosts a popular annual corn festival.

Eden is also home to the Original American Kazoo Company. Housed in an attractive Victorian house on South Main Street (Route 62), it's the only manufacturer of metal kazooos in the world. We, of course, pulled over without hesitation. The gift shop was pleasant, but we were surprised to find it didn't focus too much on kazoo heritage. But the back of the shop opens into a booming space that houses both a museum and an operational factory. The factory was a tangle of heavy machines, all connected to a single 10-horsepower engine by an impressive web of belts and pulleys. The museum was simply a fenced in area of the factory floor adorned with helpful and generally informative signs. We joined a silver-haired tour group, and listened to Karen Smith expound on some of the company's more interesting history. The first order of kazooos she filled out, Smith told us, was for a scientific expedition into the Amazon rain forest. The scientists use them to break down communication barriers with natives, and, according to Smith, "Apparently there's not a lot to do at night in the jungle."

Speaking of expeditions, we had to hit the road. On the way out, I purchased an original kazoo, fashioned, I'd like to think, after Alabama Vest's original 1840s design. It was a sleek model, the kind that would make a third grader proud—shiny copper on top and the bottom half painted with glossy red paint. Note to parents: Do not buy a kazoo for your kid(s), or they'll drive you insane. "If you don't put that kazoo away," you'll yell, "I'm gonna turn this car around!" And eventually you'll throw it out the window, as I did, and it'll be exactly like throwing \$1.99 out the window. Won't you feel bad then? I did.

Pioneer Daze

Though most of the small towns in Western New York aren't as old as Buffalo, they do have one interesting architectural timestamp that the city doesn't—one-room schoolhouses. These relics are mostly around because somebody turned them into houses, or simply because the land where they stood wasn't needed by anyone else. In North Collins, at a historical marker pointing the way to such a building, we took our first tentative side trip off of 62. It was to be short-lived.

Less than half a mile down School Street, we came upon #8 Schoolhouse, an attractively restored white building with a pump well and flagpole in front, and an equally attractive out-house in back. For the first time (and probably the last) I was prepared to immerse myself in the history of North Collins, to be regaled with the scholarly exploits of her founding fathers. But, alas, #8 Schoolhouse was closed. We had missed the three hours each week that it's open. To add to my disappointment, the pump wasn't really connected to a well. And the windows



#8 Schoolhouse in North Collins. The well in the foreground is purely for decoration. The bell probably doesn't work, either, who knows? It's pretty and pastoral, but is closed nearly all the time, save for three hours on Sunday. I'll let you guess which three.

girlfriend ordered a souvlaki wrap, and I had a half-pound burger and a vanilla milkshake. My decision was based on a craving for a big slab of cow. The milkshake, of course, came with the metal tumbler it was whipped in, "so you don't get gypped," the waitress said. I told you it was a great place. After a quick stop by my parents' house, we were on our way again.

I left my butter churn...

Past Gowanda, the road rises slowly out of the valley on a long, zig-zagging incline as it weaves its way along Thatcher Brook toward Amish country.

were too high to peek in. And, finally, the out-house was locked.

South of North Collins, Route 62 is all farmstands, u-pick berries and laundry on clotheslines. We drove hard under striking puffy gray and white clouds, through the crossroads of Lawtons and the village of Collins, former home of the World Pumpkin Weigh-off. Three years ago, fancy pants Clarence stole the thunder from this slowly diminishing town. And really, what is a place like Collins, without giant, malformed, 800-pound pumpkins? A shadow of its former self.

After Collins, Route 62 rides a two-mile-long plain alongside a sprawling medium security prison before dropping off dramatically into Gowanda's valley. Gowanda is a pretty little village of 2,700 people. Like most places down this way, its population is slowly, steadily declining. The manufacturing jobs, in the form of the Peter Cooper Glue Factory and the Moench Tannery, dried up long ago, along with most of the railroad business, and many of their buildings have crumbled and been hauled away, like so many loads of refuse.

Gowanda also happens to be my hometown. It's changed a lot since my childhood, but some things remain the same, like the annual Pioneer Days festival, which was going on this weekend. After parking the car to check out the festivities, we witnessed road magic, one of those weird, magical encounters that only seems to happen when you're traveling: Two Amish families strode out of Burger King to their buggies across the street, value meals in hand. Just another day...

The carnival was typical of a small town, with a midway featuring rickety-looking rides with names like Tilt-a-Whirl, Paratrooper and Rok 'n' Roll. It was still only noon, though, and there weren't too many people around. Even the volunteer fire department's beer tent was empty. Around town, the businesses were having sidewalk sales and everyone seemed upbeat now that the sun was assured of itself.

For lunch, we stopped into Gowanda's oldest, most established diner, the Olympia, located smack in the center of town. The fact that it stands alone in what's often considered a culinary one-horse town doesn't detract from the quality of food that the Olympia has to offer. In fact, for the many times I've been there, I've never had a bad meal. The restaurant is clean and friendly, with a bright mural of a Greek townscape painted across a back wall. Based on Olympia's reputation for Greek food, my

We blinked and missed the tiny crossroads of Dayton on our way into the Town of Leon on a long, flat stretch that is said to be an ancient lake bed. The gravel pit just off the road was further testament to that theory, and we pulled off there to watch some geese herd their goslings into a roadside pond.

There isn't a sign that welcomes you to Amish country, but there are telltale signs as you head south. First, it's just horse droppings on the shoulders of the road. Next, you notice the pale blue doors that mark the understated Amish houses. Finally you see the hand-painted signs posted in front of houses and along the road at intersections: "Leather, Harness & Saddle Repair Shop," "Nightcrawlers," "Blacksmith Shop," "Yoder's Rustic Log Furniture" and "Quilts and Jams." In all, there are about 250 Amish families in this community that encompasses Leon, Cherry Creek, New Albion and Conewango, and much of their income comes from the sale of crops and homemade goods.

Along the way, we passed many Amish in their traditional dress—the men wearing dark blue shirts, black trousers with suspenders and straw hats; the women in dark blue or green shirts and black skirts with a head covering. Many of their draft horses, mighty Percherons and Belgians, were grazing lazily in the pastures on an odd day off.

We stopped at the Valley View Cheese Factory, which produces cheese from Amish milk. The attached store sold many Amish goods, including jams, baked goods, cheeses and crafts. When I asked the helpful woman behind the

counter which cheeses were made at the factory, she pointed to two kinds. She then named about 15 other varieties in an afterthought sort of tone: "...and the Swiss, Muenster, Gouda, Romano, feta, Windsleydale are all Amish made." Hmm...Amish made, but apparently not at the factory. Looking at the cheeses produced there, we opted for the Swiss, and it was delicious.

We wanted to buy jam directly from the Amish, and the woman on duty kindly directed us to Malinda's Candy Shop on nearby Youngs Road. Malinda was a kind host, polite and quietly reserved. Her shop is tucked into a small building in front of a tidy house. Her daughter, barefooted, helped her make jams in a side room. Along with elderberry, raspberry, strawberry-rhubarb and blackberry jams, Malinda makes a variety of fudges and candies.

Eating up road

The hour was getting late, and we still had ground to cover, so we shifted into high gear after leaving Conewango. Into the hill country of the Southern Tier, the engine whined as our trusty Elantra hungrily ate up the miles. We stopped only once before reaching Ellicottville, at the Ellington General Store. "General" might be an overstatement, since most of the wares on-hand were antiques, including, perhaps, the stick candy—15 cents apiece/25 cents for two—arranged in glass jars on the front counter. But the store impressed me with its resilience in a country where many similar businesses have been shuttered for years.

We drove through Randolph and Little Valley, in what I'd like to call "Blank Hill country." Half the roads we passed were called something or another "Hill Rd."—Seager Hill Rd., North Hill Rd., Leach Hill Rd., Cemetery Hill Rd. and on and on. A couple of "Chew Mailpouch" advertisements, painted on the sides of barns, floated by us like messages in a bottle, sent from a distant past.



This is Earl's on Rte. 16 in Arcade. If you haven't been there, you really haven't been anywhere. Where have you been, after all? Earl wants to know, too, and I'll warn you, he doesn't look like a happy customer.

Home of the fruit jar drinkers

In Ellicottville, we caught wind of a jazz festival, but it was sparsely attended. We spent a brief layover there re-energizing with coffee and beer, and watched Buffalo gypsy jazz band Babik groove at Balloons Restaurant. But dark was quickly approaching, and I was bound by oath to finish out the night 15 miles away in Arcade.

We chose to take Route 242, which passes through a broad valley with expansive views that reminded me of the Western prairies. Part of that feeling probably had to do with the herds of bison and elk that dotted the valley floor. Yes, bison and elk. The B&B Buffalo Ranch, which is reportedly the largest buffalo ranch east of the Mississippi, calls this valley home. We dutifully pulled over and snapped a few photos, but there was no time to waste. Our stomachs were empty and Earl's was still miles up the road.

Onto Rte. 16, we turned north and cruised through Machias, Lime Lake and Delevan. Of note is Lime Lake, which I find to be an odd little place. It's similar to Chautauqua, in that it is mostly cute cottages perched on the lakeshore, many paired with formal boathouses. But the lake itself is a tiny 159 acres, only a speck compared to Chautauqua's 13,000 acres. It makes one wonder where they all go boating to. ("Gee, Helen, it seems like we've passed that same house three times in the last 10 minutes!")

Past Little Valley, we picked up Whig Street and followed it to Hungry Hollow Rd. That eventually faded into a gravel road as we entered Rock City State Forest.

Rock on

Little Rock City is the largest rock city in Western New York that's located on publicly owned land. A rock city is basically a rock formation made up of huge boulders arranged by nature in rows that have the appearance of city streets. In the end, they are simply fun hiking. After a few bumpy miles of gravel and dirt road, we arrived at the trail into Little Rock City. It was an easy, if a bit unsettling, hike of about a mile. There's something eerily fascinating about the labyrinths of stone. The light quality in some of the narrower streets—Wall Street and Broadway, as named by local naturalist Bruce Kershner—is singular. It's a unique place, and should be seen. Special note: Bring boots. These streets don't get a lot of sunlight, and as such are quite muddy.

When we finally reached Arcade, the puffy clouds had cleared off to the east, and the sun was sitting low in the west. Despite our hunger, we passed up the Pizza Hut and the Burger King. It wasn't long, however, before the 30'x90' American flag that marked our destination appeared, waving low on the horizon.

We were finally at Earl's Restaurant, "Home of the Original Fruit Jar Drinkers." I can't say enough about Earl's. It's like going to Grandma's house, only weirder. The place was established by Earl and Marilyn Northrup in 1956 as Earl's Drive-in. Earl, it turns out, was a voracious promoter of country and bluegrass music, and he used to put on huge concerts in the park behind the restaurant. A glass case inside the restaurant is filled with odd Nashville paraphernalia, including Tammy Wynette's dress, Bashful Brother Oswald's overalls and a letter from Patsy Cline written to Jimmy Dale. There are hat hooks on the walls, presumably for those wearing the wide-brimmed variety.

It also turns out that Earl has a sense of humor. The simple homestyle tables wear jeans and boots...they are, after all, called table "legs." There's a cinnamon roll on the menu that's "as big as Earl's hat," and that's not just cheap talk. I've had one before, along with five other family members, and we couldn't finish the whole thing. For reasons unclear to me, they serve up drinks in Ball wide-mouth jam jars.

The point is that it's the atmosphere that makes this place, not the food. The pies are huge and delicious, but the meatloaf that I couldn't resist ordering was regrettable. In fact, I regretted it for the whole ride home...

Critical numbers:

Miles traveled: 187.2
Amish buggies passed: 8
Kazoos thrown out the window: 1
Fruit jars used as glasses: 2
Satisfied travelers: 2

POLIS REALTY

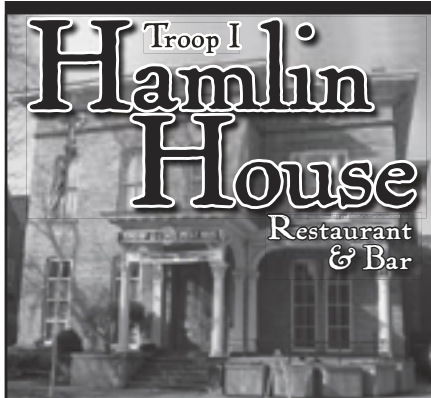


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Lake Effect

A Sunday drive down Route 5

> STORY BY BUCK QUIGLEY > PHOTOS BY HEATHER QUIGLEY



Graycliff wouldn't be a bad place to hang your hat.

I'll tell you, people, it can be hard being an old traveler like myself, steeped in the jazzy breakneck literature of the Beats, wondering where did the time go and how did I wind up here in love with a beautiful woman with a beautiful little five-year-old daughter who's sleeping in the room down the hall as I type my reminiscences of a short Sunday drive down one of the many charming, gossamer routes spinning out from our city—like a web spun by a spider on LSD—meandering, struggling to be useful, but mainly just forming an interesting design.

Let me come clean off the bat. I love the Skyway. I know it's an eyesore in need of repair, from below, but I will forever miss it—and the vista it offers—when it's gone. I spent many years of my life living in Allentown and working in Lackawanna. As I look back, one of the things I may have enjoyed the most was the incredible view I had every morning, year 'round, with a bird's eye look at that enormous body of water called Lake Erie. It was exciting for me to think that it was built to let tall boats, full of the booty of America, come floating up to our extensive network of grain elevators. But, of course, that's gone like yesterday's Wheaties.

It's fun to think of the past while we explore our region. As you go up the Skyway heading south from town, be sure to look to your left at the structure that rises like a miniature Superdome—the HSBC Arena. Do any of you remember when it was referred to as the Crossroads Arena? That was the working name for our hockey home before the naming rights were sold to an international banking firm. It was a big deal at the time.

As you descend from the Skyway, you'll see billboards and the huge lakeside bar/restaurant called the Pier—which is either closed or under new management at any given moment—to your right. To your left, as the grain elevators subside, you'll see Tiff Nature Pre-

serve—where you can often feed chickadees and other hungry birds from your hand with some seeds in cold months. Where you can marvel at deer left to this desolate but peaceful habitat and understand that they are simple, beautiful, dumb animals who don't obey the trappings of real estate deals. Occasionally they are even known to commit suicide missions against cars driving too fast through their turf. And sometimes they even cause death to human loved ones. And that is why I never turn down a piece of venison.

Moving further south on Route 5, you pass Ridge Road. If you're curious, or if you care anymore, you are approximately one mile from the little convenience store that was the headquarters of the "Lackawanna Six." Or eight. I can't recall how many there were... but I know the whole country felt better in the days after 9-11, after we caught them. That sure was a turning point.

Next you're into the area we will probably all see as long as we live. When I was a kid, people simply referred to it as "Bethlehem." As the name implies, it's really a sacred place. To drive south through it now on Route 5, you can look to the right and see vast expanses of land, factories and train tracks, forever cutting you off from the lakefront view.

These are some of the remains—in conjunction with other World War II industries—that really put our area on the map. If you can imagine an America that cranked out steel, airplanes, railroads, freighters, all kinds of goods and food by the strength of its own character back in the day... then look to your left and right as you drive through this semi-ghost town and think of the hard-working men and women who lived, loved, fought, drank, smoked, worshipped, cheated, cussed, cried and raised families here. Most, I believe, have left somehow or an-

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other. Because the population of our city has decreased by more than a million since they were here.

Now you're stretching south. Go past the Ford plant, past the strip joint made famous by the film *Buffalo 66*, stay on Route 5 and just keep heading down the lakeshore. Here's where you first get the opportunity to look at the cliffs that characterize the eastern shore of Lake Erie. This is your first glimpse of the water since cresting the Skyway, and the vastness of the lake on the day of our drive seemed infinite. Smooth as glass, barely rippling in the humid haze that blurred the horizon so that the slate blue-gray tones of water and sky seemed one. Past Woodlawn, Cloverbank and Wannakah. Be sure to keep your eyes peeled for the spot where the Seaway Trail jogs right onto Old Lake Shore Road. This is the road to take. California has its majestic Route 1 along the Pacific coast. We have Old Lake Shore Road.

You'll have noticed by this point that this is a different neighborhood than the grain mills. Huge homes hide behind stone fences—dignified, enigmatic and remote as Charles Foster Kane. You're looking for Graycliff, and even though you're following the signs, it can sneak up on you. Graycliff is an architectural treasure of our area, and it's fun to pull in there on a summer day with someone you love and imagine the house as your own—fixed up, of course, since it's going through a much needed renovation—but still beautiful, like an old movie star whose striking features are still there beneath the hard-earned lines of joy, heartache and neglect. Stand for a moment and picture the sun setting through the westward-facing windows to remind yourself that some people really have all the luck. Spend an hour taking the \$10 tour, get some culture and then say, "So long,



Great American food at Castaways Bar & Grill

Frank Lloyd Wright."

Continue on past the fishermen parked by 18 Mile Creek. Or stop and drop a line if you're so inclined. But as you drive on, notice the cars parked on the roadside at Bennett Beach. Officially closed, but clearly in use. Explore further at your own risk.

Soon you'll be rolling into Angola. You'll know by the appearance of summer cottages and the fragrance of sunblock that you've just driven out of an F. Scott Fitzgerald novel and into a segment of MTV's *Spring Break*. This is *Mickey Rats* and *Captain Kidd's*—Mecca of summertime decadence for Western New York. Already the place is crawling with beach bums, bronzed beyond belief for late May. There's something vaguely suburban about this meat-market crowd, but what a great place to listen to Dexty's *Midnight Runners* at high volume and walk around body watch-

ing. Think Chippewa in your underwear.

If you're a little older, and especially if you're traveling with children, continue on just a little further to Castaways Bar & Grill. It has the feel of a little Florida beach bar, serves good bar food and there's a much more laid-back vibe. There's also a little playground and you're only 50 yards to Lake Erie Beach.

As you continue on, be on the lookout for Evangola State Park. Here you can also get to the water, and there's a big bathhouse. But perhaps more importantly, there is an underutilized Frisbee golf course. A great place to while away an afternoon practicing an obscure sport from the 1970s.

Now you're on your way to the Seneca Reservation. On the bright, sunny day of our trip we wondered about the huge number of people hidden away in the Bingo Hall. The sheer number of cars packed into the

lot surely dwarfed that of any church parking lot in the region—and probably does on any given Sunday. It's hard to believe that gambling's a sin. Just a little further on the right you come upon the Seneca Hawk Family Fun Center. This is still a very new facility and wasn't very crowded when we were there. Driving range, miniature golf, batting cages, go-karts.

Since you're here, fill up on gas. It's still a little cheaper on the reservation, and it'll help your conscience to think that—even though you've just spent an afternoon contributing to global warming—you still practice the virtue of thrift.

From here, you can continue on to Dunkirk and either head inland or continue toward Pennsylvania. Either way will put you smack dab in the middle of our grape growing region. There are a lot of small wineries where you can pretend you're in California wine country—again, the similarity between the eastern Lake Erie shore and the Pacific.

That's another diversion, but since my wife and I had to get home to collect our daughter from our friends' house, we decided to pack it home on the Interstate 90. And to former road dogs like my carny wife and me, there's something comforting in the sound of a Freightliner winding out for parts unknown. Transporting the things we need, moving the possessions of families across the big American landscape like seeds blown by the wind, searching for home in the wide-open and rootless expanse of our country. It was good to know we could get that taste of free-wheeling adventure all in an afternoon, and still be home for dinner and an episode of *Sponge Bob Squarepants* before kissing goodnight and facing the school and work week.

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Crystal City

Route 86 to Corning, N.Y.

> BY KATHERINE O'DAY

To get to the Finger Lakes, it is but a hop and a skip into the car and then no more than a puddle-jump onto Route 63, off Interstate 90, at Batavia. Before you really feel like you've left the Buffalo area, Geneseo appears along with the first signs for Letchworth State Park, and here a choice presents itself: Continue on Route 63, with the winding country roads and crumbling old farmhouses lending a gothic touch to the pastoral landscape, or grab the I-390 to the 86 East/17 South.

If you are in a hurry, as we were, taking the main route seems reasonably faster than to risk being caught behind a slow-moving tractor all the way down the 63. So we followed the common wisdom and arrived at our destination of Corning, New York, in a little over two and a half hours. Corning,

otherwise known as "The Crystal City," is home to the Corning Museum of Glass, a gorgeous example of 1950s progressive architecture that was designed by Wallace Harrison in 1951. At the time, this merging of art and industry was a landmark in American architecture, and it is just as stunning today. Corning also has the Rockwell Museum of Western Art, which boasts a nationally respected collection of American Western and Native American art. The Rockwell Museum was gearing up for an exhibit of work by Ansel Adams during our visit, which, unfortunately, we missed by a week. A joint day pass for both museums is for sale at either, and since they are within a 10-minute walk of each other—a walk which will also take you through Corning's quaint Historic District—that's a nice option.

Corning was the cradle of the glass mak-

ing industry in the US after the Civil War ended, and the museum was erected as a monument to the city's industrial history. It is now an international draw for tourists, and there were just as many foreign faces and languages on the day we visited as there are on your average warm-weather day at Niagara Falls. The museum complex itself looks thoroughly modern, with the factory and studio areas and high-rise corporate headquarters sheathed in dark, visually impenetrable glass, while the museum entrance, courtyard café, activity areas and glass bridge walkways are all light and color. After visiting a few of the exhibition rooms, which contain glass sculpture, artifacts, stained glass, etc., I surmised that the ominous dark glass exterior isn't mysterious at all; it serves the purpose of protecting the

The Corning Museum of Glass, designed by Wallace Harrison in 1951, is a stunning example of 1950s progressive architecture.

glasswork from the sun's damaging rays, which can make glass warp and color fade.

On the day of our visit these rays were as bright as they get around those parts, and this made it rather a chore to stay inside the museum, which recommends you allow at least four hours for your visit. So after a tour of the exhibits, which run approximately every hour, and a visit to the Steuben Glass Studio where you can make your own ornament, glass flower or sandblasted piece (there is an age limit on these activities, however—a restriction that greatly disappointed my daughter), we started to plan a way to spend the rest of the day outdoors. Nevertheless, we didn't leave the museum



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above: Keuka Lake, just outside Corning, is in the neighborhood of eight wineries.



left: The Heron Hill Winery looks like a fairy tale, a gingerbread house perched high over a gorgeous vista of Keuka Lake.

in a close bout with the surprisingly crisp and practically oakless Chardonnay. We bought a bottle of each.

After the informative session, things at Dr. Frank's started to break down a bit, but only for the greater good. I now recommend hitting a wine-tasting within an hour of business close, and for this reason: By the end of the

before a tempting and potentially costly visit to the Museum Gift Shop where, to my astonishment, the deep, bowl-shaped goblets so popular in wine bars were on sale at six for \$15. Of course, add some painted flowers or color swirls to these same glasses and the price increases exponentially. For real high rollers, there are dazzling glass works for sale by internationally renowned artists such as Nourot, Strini, Milon Townsend, and Bertil Vallien, among others. For my part, I escaped without buying anything, and the rest of the day's activities ranged from extremely cheap to completely free.

We decided to see the Keuka Lake wine trails, starting with Dr. Konstantine Frank's Vinifera Wine Cellars, which ranked Number One in the *Wine Report 2005* list of the "Top Ten Greatest Wine Producers" in the Atlantic Northeast. I suppose the idea behind free wine tastings is that the taster feels compelled, either through appreciation or obligation, to make hefty purchases from said winery after all the hospitality and free samples, a tactic that certainly worked at Dr. Frank's.

The woman conducting our tasting, Colleen, hailed originally from Northern Ireland but came to New York via Yorkshire. Her charming accent underscored her obvious wine knowledge, and she could've told me their wines contained a youth serum that made you live forever and I'd have believed her. In fact, she actually said something like this about their Fleur de Pinot Noir, which happens to be the richest in something called *resveratrol*, a natural, heart-helping compound found in the skins of red grapes that is especially concentrated in Finger Lakes grapes. Whatever the magical properties of the pinot, Dr. Frank's Sparkling Blanc de Blanc won out

day, most of the employees and representatives at a given winery are bound to have sampled a bit of the product, as simple professionalism would dictate. In addition to the intimate and generous "wine flight," we were treated to good-natured antics from a quip-trading staff, who were combining their cleanup efforts to glue each and every empty bottle to the bottom of the cases they were replaced into—the better to frustrate the inventory taker, I presume. In any case, it was cause for much hilarity at the time...but maybe you had to be there.

We visited one more, the Heron Hill Winery, before returning to Corning. Located downhill from the famed Bully Hill Vineyards—too daunting for this trip, I decided—Heron Hill looks like a fairy tale, a gingerbread house perched high over a gorgeous vista of Keuka Lake, with the grape vines laid out all along the hillsides. We opted for a \$5 "premium tasting," which was quite nice—though, for what it's worth, Dr. Frank's was more formally run, despite the antics. More informative, more delicious and cheaper, too.

The greatest expense of the trip was the hotel accommodation, which would have been easily avoidable if we hadn't decided to stay so we could watch last Sunday's hockey game—a thankless endeavor, to say the least. However, we made up the lost time, if not the money, on the way back, when I fortuitously missed the exit to the 63 at Mt. Morris. We ended up taking Route 20A all the way back, and we made the return trip—door-to-door from Corning to the offices of Artvoice—in two hours, four minutes, all told. And honestly, I never went above 80.

av

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