

# Following fall

Five states of color are just a drive away

**By Don Davenport**

Special to the Tribune

*Published August 28, 2005*

Silent as Carl Sandburg's fog arriving on little cat's feet, the autumn color season slides soundlessly from north to south. It is nature's finest performance, albeit often too short.

## **Illinois: Rock River ramble**

**THE ROUTE:** Along the scenic Rock River, from Rockford to Dixon on Illinois Highway 2.

**THE HIGHLIGHTS:** From Rockford, the first stop is Byron, where the community Civil War Memorial in the middle of an intersection shows some dings. Nearby, the Byron Forest Preserve has golf, two museums, a restored prairie and hiking trails. Leombruni's Italian Village offers delicious homemade Italian food (moderate).

On to Oregon, home to Lowden State Park and wonderful bluff-top views of the Rock River. For a water-level view, take a Rock River lunch or dinner cruise on the paddle-wheeler Pride of Oregon. Oregon hosts a big autumn festival, Autumn on Parade, the first weekend in October (Oct. 1 and 2 this year). **Pinehill Inn Bed and Breakfast** has six rooms in an 1874 Italianate Estate (\$90-\$195; 800-851-0131; [www.pinehillbb.com](http://www.pinehillbb.com)).

Just south of Oregon, Castle Rock State Park (a day-use park) has views of the river, hiking trails, picnic facilities and a nature preserve.

Farther south is charming Grand Detour, where the John Deere Historic Site preserves the home Deere built in 1836. The Colonial Rose Inn, an 1855 Italianate B&B, offers four rooms with private bath and full breakfast (\$90; 815-652-4422; [www.colonialroseinn.com](http://www.colonialroseinn.com)).

The drive ends in Dixon, home to the Ronald Reagan Boyhood Home, from where it's an easy drive back to the Chicago area on Interstate Highway 88.

**SIDE TRIPS:** Eight miles west of Oregon, White Pines Inn at White Pines Forest State Park has log-cabin lodging (try to snag a cancellation), a restaurant in the original log lodge and a dinner theater.

**BEST TIME FOR FALL COLOR:** Mid- to late October.

**ILLINOIS FALL COLOR INFO:** 800-2CONNECT; [www.enjoyillinois.com](http://www.enjoyillinois.com)