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Historic Sites of Mackinac State Historic Parks Open Next Week

MACKINAW CITY, MICH. — The historic sites of Mackinac State Historic Parks open for the 2022 season beginning Tuesday, May 3 through Friday, May 6.

“As we continue to get back to normal, we look forward to offering the variety of experiences our guests have come to expect, and are excited to debut some new programs and exhibits as well,” said Steve Brisson, Mackinac State Historic Parks Director.

Fort Mackinac will open first, on May 3. The first cannon of the season will sound at 9:00 a.m., kicking off the 2022 season. Inside the fort, the Schoolhouse has been completely remodeled and reimagined into the Reading Room, as it would have been known in the 1880s. This immersive space allows you to explore popular titles of the 1880s, read the latest (1880s) newspaper or periodical, and get a better understanding of what it was like to be a soldier in the 1880s and why the U.S. Army felt it was a good idea to have reading rooms within its forts. This exhibit was made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom.

“This exhibit introduces our visitors to the immigrant experience in the U.S. Army of the late 19th century, army reforms, and education at Fort Mackinac,” Brisson said.

Additionally at Fort Mackinac, daily programs and tours will highlight the changing face of Fort Mackinac, the role women played at the fort, Mackinac’s time as a national park, and a look at who exactly made up the army of the 1880s. The popular drill and rifle firing program, which has been

removed from the schedule due to Covid concerns the past two years, will return, and guests can expect rifle and cannon firing demonstrations throughout the day. The Tea Room at Fort Mackinac, operated by Grand Hotel, features new menu items for the 2022 season, and, as always, will feature one of the most stunning views in Michigan. One way to make a visit to Fort Mackinac the most memorable is to fire the opening cannon salute.

The Biddle House, featuring the Mackinac Island Native American Museum, The Richard & Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum, and the Benjamin Blacksmith Shop also open on May 3. A new juried art exhibition will debut on the second floor of the art museum – “Mackinac Journeys.” Every Mackinac journey is unique. From lifelong residents to the novice first-timer, the journey to, around, and from Mackinac is always memorable. The gallery will be on display through October 9. At the Biddle House, programs in the afternoon will discuss the Treaty of Washington and explore the lives of three prominent Mackinac women: Agatha Biddle, Magdelaine Laframboise, and Elizabeth Mitchell. The blacksmith shop will feature a working blacksmith throughout the season.

Over in Mackinaw City, Colonial Michilimackinac will be the first site to open, on May 4. Guests entering Michilimackinac will be taking a step back in time to 1779, as the American Revolution headed west. Special tours and programs will take place throughout the summer highlighting the year.

One guest, every day, has the opportunity to fire all four black powder weapon Colonial Michilimackinac: the Short Land Musket, Wall Gun (a BIG musket), Coehorn Mortar, and, as the finale, the cannon. This program is available every evening after the fort closes for regular business May 4 - October 6.

Mackinac State Historic Parks’ archaeology program at Colonial Michilimackinac will enter its 64th season in 2022. Work will continue in House E of the Southeast Rowhouse at Colonial Michilimackinac. Archaeologists will be out daily (weather permitting) during the summer months. Guests also have the opportunity to see the most recent finds at Colonial Michilimackinac with a new “Recent Excavations” display inside the Colonial Michilimackinac Visitor’s Center.

Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse will open May 5. The ongoing restoration of the lighthouse continues in 2022, as an oil house will be reconstructed on the property. The last few years have seen several gallery openings at the lighthouse – the Straits of Mackinac Shipwreck Museum, the Science and Technology Exhibit, and the Marshall Gallery on the extensively renovated second floor. Throughout the day guides will sound the Fog Signal Whistle and provide tours of the lighthouse tower.

Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park will be the last site to open, on May 6. Demonstrations of the sawpit and sawmill take place throughout the day, in addition to a new “Farming at Mill Creek” program, which will explore 19th century farming at the site. Sowing, flailing, and grinding grain, cutting firewood, growing gardens, and tending livestock are just some of the activities that took place there from 1790-1840. Guests are encouraged to roll up their sleeves and take part in life beyond the sawmill at Mill Creek.

New nature programs have also been added to the daily schedule, allowing guests to meet a naturalist at the picnic area for a 30-minute program that will feature something for all ages. Topics will vary and may include a guided nature walk, stories, and fun activities focused on plants and animals living at Historic Mill Creek.

Two new publications will be on the shelves of Mackinac State Historic Parks’ museum stores: *The Fort Mackinac Base Ball Club*, a vignette by former Mackinac State Historic Parks Director Phil Porter, will explore the history of the Fort Mackinac *Never Sweats* “base ball” club from 1871-1894. Another vignette, *A Spirit of Dissention and Disobedience in the Troops: Military Mischief at Michilimackinac, 1780-81*, by Chief Curator Craig Wilson, describes the summer of 1780 at Michilimackinac and an incident that set off a chain reaction that destabilized Michilimackinac’s garrison for over a year. In addition, new merchandise inspired by the various historic sites and parks will be available at all museum stores.

Mackinac State Historic Parks will feature several special events throughout the 2022 season at all sites. Check out mackinacparks.com for a detailed list of events.

The American Fur Co. Store & Dr. Beaumont Museum, McGulpin House, and British Landing Nature Center will all open in June.

For the Reading Room exhibit at Fort Mackinac: “Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this exhibit, do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.”

Dates and hours of operation, daily events, and more can be found on mackinacparks.com. Additional pictures available upon request. A downloadable version of this release can be found here.

Mackinac State Historic Parks, a family of living history museums and parks in northern Michigan's Straits of Mackinac, is an agency within the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Its sites—which are accredited by the American Alliance of Museums—include Fort Mackinac, the Biddle House, The Richard and Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum, Historic Downtown Mackinac, and Mackinac Island State Park on Mackinac Island, and Colonial Michilimackinac, Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park and Michilimackinac State Park in Mackinaw City. Mackinac State Historic Parks is governed by the Mackinac Island State Park Commission, established in 1895 to protect, preserve and present the parks' rich historic and natural resources for the education and recreation of future generations. Visitor information is available at (231) 436-4100 or on the web at www.mackinacparks.com.

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