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What's New at Mackinac State Historic Parks?

MACKINAW CITY, MICH. — As the calendar flips to the new year, the Mackinac State Historic Parks crew is busy preparing its historic sites and parks for an exciting 2023 season.

“We are excited to welcome visitors to experience our parks and numerous attractions,” said Steve Brisson, Mackinac State Historic Parks Director. “We have added a variety of new exhibits and programs over the last few years, and our staff is busy preparing to have everything ready for our spring openings.”

2023 marks the 125th anniversary of the automobile ban on Mackinac Island. Mackinac State Historic Parks will mark this occasion with a special event on July 22, complete with an 1886 Benz Motorwagen on the island. The “horseless vehicle” will also be on display outside Fort Mackinac during the day on July 22. A special commemorative logo has been developed and will be found on merchandise at Mackinac State Historic Parks museum stores, as well as on the license plates found on carriages throughout the island. A new vignette, written by former Mackinac State Historic Parks’ Director Phil Porter, will also be published for the anniversary.

“Mackinac Island is famous for many things, but the century and a quarter-old ban on motorized vehicles is truly at the top of why it is such a special place,” Brisson said.

Staying on the island, Fort Mackinac opens for the 2023 season on May 4. The museum store and theater have swapped spaces, with the store now in the Commissary and the theater now in the Soldiers’ Barracks. The swap is part of a larger interpretive plan for the barracks which will happen in stages in

coming years. The Fort Mackinac Museum Store will continue to feature publications, apparel, and one-of-a-kind souvenirs.

Additionally at Fort Mackinac, a new program titled “Soldier’s Gear and Quartermasters’ Storehouse” will allow visitors to see what soldiers would have been issued at Fort Mackinac in the 1880s and how that had an impact on their daily lives. Classic programs, such as the rifle and cannon firing demonstrations, will feature fresh perspectives. Other programs will highlight the changing face of Fort Mackinac, the historic residents who called the fort home, a look at Mackinac as a national park, the role women played at the fort, and what happened in the evening at Fort Mackinac.

“We hope to display the unique mix of the military culture and tourism at Fort Mackinac in those last years of Mackinac National Park,” explained Jack Swartzinski, Mackinac State Historic Parks’ Interpretation Coordinator.

The Tea Room at Fort Mackinac, operated by Grand Hotel, will feature new menu items for the 2023 season, and, as always, will feature one of the most stunning views in Michigan. Perhaps the way to make a Fort Mackinac visit most memorable is firing the opening cannon salute, which is available to one guest daily. More information can be found [here](#).

Elsewhere on Mackinac Island, the McGulpin House, one of the oldest residential structures on the island (built in 1790) and a rare and excellent display of French Canadian domestic architecture, will receive brand new exhibits for the 2023 season. The Biddle House, featuring the Mackinac Island Native American Museum, shares the continuing store of the Anishnaabek on Mackinac Island, with daily interpretive programs and engaging exhibits. The Benjamin Blacksmith Shop, located next door to the Biddle House, is a working blacksmith shop that dives into the 1950s and the changing culture of workers on Mackinac Island. The American Fur Co. Store & Dr. Beaumont Museum received a new exhibit in 2022. Admission to all of these sites is included with a Fort Mackinac or Historic Downtown Mackinac ticket.

At The Richard & Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum, located in front of Fort Mackinac in Marquette Park, a new juried art exhibition will debut on the second floor – “A Mackinac Day.” There’s

always something special about being able to spend a day on Mackinac. The sun seems to shine a little brighter. The sky seems a little bluer. Even days where things don't go to plan can seem perfect. Everybody has their "Mackinac Day." The gallery will be on display from May 12 – October 8. An art attendant, new for 2023, will guide guests through the museum and provide a better understanding of the art and artists who have created art inspired by the Straits of Mackinac. Additionally, eight artists-in-residence will stay on Mackinac Island throughout the summer. Each artist will host a special, free workshop on the second Wednesday of their residency.

The Biddle House, featuring the Mackinac Island Native American Museum, Benjamin Blacksmith Shop, and The Richard & Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum open for the 2023 season on May 12. The McGulpin House and American Fur Co. Store & Dr. Beaumont Museum open June 3.

Special events at Fort Mackinac and Mackinac Island include Twilight Turtle Treks on January 7, February 7 and March 7; the Fort2Fort Five Mile Challenge May 13; the annual Vintage Base Ball game July 29; special activities for July 4; special history evening programs including a guided tour of Historic Downtown Mackinac as it would have looked in the 1830s and a tour highlighting the creation of the village of Mackinac Island; special nature and birdwatching tours; night sky programs at Fort Holmes and Arch Rock; bike tours looking at Mackinac's forgotten features and the War of 1812; and much more. More information can be found at mackinacparks.com/events.

The year 1780 will be explored at Colonial Michilimackinac, in Mackinaw City, where mischief and mayhem reigned. 1780 saw this isolated British outpost become a scene of paranoia, military mischief, and, from a certain point of view, mutiny. A special daily program will explore this spirit of dissention and disobedience that destabilized Michilimackinac's garrison.

Other programs throughout the day explore the rich history of the site and showcase how it was more than a military outpost. Get an up-close look at the merchandise that passed through Michilimackinac during the height of the fur trade; explore dining culture at a Merchant's House; learn about the enslaved community at Michilimackinac; explore the 5,500 square feet of gardens during an engaging tour; have tea at a British Trader's home and dive into the complexities of British society; find

out what civilians and soldiers were up to; and, of course, feel the power of Michilimackinac's weapons with musket and artillery firings.

The Mackinac State Historic Parks' archaeology program will enter its 65th season in 2023. 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 will 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.

Guests now have two opportunities to fire weapons at Colonial Michilimackinac: an opening cannon blast, at 9:30 a.m., or they can fire the full complement of weapons at Guns Across the Straits. Reservations for either program can be made by calling (231) 436-4100. More information can be found [here](#).

Special events at Colonial Michilimackinac include exhilarating "Fire at Night" programs, deep dives into Michilimackinac's maritime history, a celebration of the King's Birth-day on June 4, a look at Askin's Men and Women at Michilimackinac in August, a moonlit Michilimackinac evening, the ever-popular Fort Fright, and A Colonial Christmas. More information can be found at mackinacparks.com/events.

Colonial Michilimackinac opens for the 2023 season May 10.

"Colonial Michilimackinac will continue to provide an interesting and unique look into the early history of the Straits of Mackinac in 2023, and we invite you to explore Colonial Michilimackinac and the exciting history of the great lakes fur trade," said LeeAnn Ewer, Mackinac State Historic Parks' Curator of Interpretation.

The ongoing restoration of Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse continues in 2023, 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, a 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. Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse opens on May 11.

Programs at Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park feature daily demonstrations of a reconstructed 18th century sawmill. With the smell of fresh sawdust in the air, the awesome power of the water never fails to impress as the mill springs to life, fed by the pond and ever-flowing currents of Mill Creek. Near the workshop, sawpit demonstrations and historic farming programs highlight what life was like beyond the sawmill more than 200 years ago. On the wild side, guests will make new discoveries as wildflowers bloom and wildlife flourishes along 3.5 miles of nature trails. Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park opens for the 2023 season May 12.

A streamlined Forest Adventure Experience, formerly the Adventure Tour, features the Forest Canopy Bridge, Eagles' Flight Zip Line, and Treetop Discovery Climbing Wall. Forest Adventure Experiences are available beginning June 9.

"The story of Mill Creek links all MSHP sites together," said Kyle Bagnall, Mackinac State Historic Parks' Park Naturalist. "Whether you're watching sawdust fly in the sawmill, soaring down the zipline, or perched on the treetop discovery tower, you're sure to experience Mackinac's natural and cultural wonders in many unique ways."

Every museum store will feature new items inspired by the site they represent. The Official Mackinac Island State Park Store, inside the Mackinac Island State Park Visitor's Center, will continue to have new items inspired by the historic and natural elements of Mackinac Island.

Most major projects were funded, in part, by Mackinac Associates. Visit mackinacparks.com for a complete listing of updates and projects at Mackinac State Historic Parks, hours of operation, daily events, special events, and more.

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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