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Celebrating 125 Years of the Mackinac Island Automobile Ban

MACKINAW CITY, MICH. — There are so many things that make Mackinac Island special. A cannon blast coming from the Revolutionary War-era fort every morning to wake the island up. The smell of fudge tempting you as walk down Main Street. The natural beauty that is Arch Rock. Lilacs bursting throughout the island in early June.

However, it's the distinct lack of something that most people might point to as being the thing that makes the island special.

“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,” said Mackinac State Historic Parks Director Steve Brisson.

2023 marks the 125th anniversary of the automobile ban on Mackinac Island. Mackinac State Historic Parks is celebrating the occasion with special events the weekend of July 21, complete with an 1886 Benz Motorwagen on the island. It was a vehicle very similar to this that got the wheels in motion (no pun intended) for the ban on automobiles.

“The Mackinac Island State Park Commission has been honored to work with and partner with the City of Mackinac Island for more than a century on the ban on automobiles,” Brisson said. “We continue to partner with the city to enforce this ban that is crucial to maintaining the heritage of Mackinac Island.”

The weekend will begin with a ceremonial “re-banning” of automobiles on Mackinac Island. The Motorwagen will take a short drive down Market Street to Mackinac Island City Council before Brisson and Mackinac Island Mayor Margaret Doud reaffirm the ban. This event will begin at 7:00 p.m.

The “horseless vehicle” will also be on display outside Fort Mackinac at the Huron Road Pavilion from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, July 22, and Sunday, July 23. A member of the Gilmore Car Museum will provide interpretation and visitors will be able to take pictures. On the evening of July 22 an invite-only event, presented by Mackinac Island Carriage Tours, will take place at Fort Mackinac officially commemorating the ban on automobiles on Mackinac Island.

Mackinac State Historic Parks has partnered with the Gilmore Car Museum, located outside Kalamazoo, to bring the Motorwagen to the island.

Former Mackinac State Historic Parks Director Phil Porter has written a new vignette on the automobile ban: *Where Horse is King: Mackinac Island’s Automobile Ban*. It provides the complete background on the restriction on automobiles, including efforts over the years to get around the ban or repeal it. The book is available at all Mackinac State Historic Parks museum stores.

In addition, a special commemorative logo has been developed and can be found on merchandise at Mackinac State Historic Parks museum stores, as well as on the license plates found on carriages throughout the island.

In addition to Mackinac Island Carriage Tours, the special weekend celebrating Mackinac Island’s ban on automobiles has been made possible by Mackinac Associates, friends preserving and sharing Mackinac’s heritage.

A downloadable version of this release can be found [here](#). Additional pictures available upon request.

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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