



CONTACT: Dominick Miller
millerd44@michigan.gov
Mackinac State Historic Parks
Phone: (231) 436-4100
www.mackinacparks.com

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Busy Week of Openings For Mackinac State Historic Parks

MACKINAW CITY, MICH. — After a successful opening weekend for Fort Mackinac, on Mackinac Island, attention shifts to the mainland and other sites as Mackinac State Historic Parks opens Colonial Michilimackinac, Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park, The Richard & Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum, Biddle House, featuring the Mackinac Island Native American Museum, and Benjamin Blacksmith Shop.

“We are excited to welcome visitors to experience our historic sites and parks,” said Steve Brisson, Mackinac State Historic Parks Director.

Colonial Michilimackinac, at the base of the Mackinac Bridge in Mackinaw City, opens for the season tomorrow, May 9. The year 1780 will be explored, a time of mischief and mayhem. 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 dissent 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 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 Thursday, May 11.

Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park opens for the 2023 season on Friday, May 12. Programs 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.

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.”

Several sites on Mackinac Island also open on Friday, May 12: The Richard & Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum, Biddle House, featuring the Mackinac Island Native American Museum, and Benjamin Blacksmith Shop.

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.” 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, invites guests to explore the continuing story of the Anishnaabek people of the Straits of Mackinac, told through the lens of Agatha Biddle. The Benjamin Blacksmith Shop, located next door to the Biddle House, features a working blacksmith. Admission to the art museum, Biddle House, and Benjamin Blacksmith Shop is included with a Fort Mackinac ticket.

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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