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## Mackinac State Historic Parks’ Historic Sites Open in Early May

MACKINAW CITY, MICH. — Opening days for the various historic sites managed by Mackinac State Historic Parks begin in roughly one month, starting with Fort Mackinac on May 3 followed by Colonial Michilimackinac May 8, Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse May 9, and Historic Mill Creek and Historic Downtown Mackinac May 10.

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

Fort Mackinac will feature two entirely new programs for 2024: “Medicine at Mackinac,” where interpreters will provide the history of Army Surgeons and how the Army began changing military medicine in the 1880s; and a Guard Mount Program, which will show guests how soldiers would conduct this complex military ceremony.

Other programs at the fort include a walking tour about the changing face of Fort Mackinac, an exploration of the people who lived and worked at the fort, how the Army of the 1880s conducted itself, a look at Mackinac’s time as a national park, a program showcasing the equipment a soldier was issued, and an exploration of what happened at Fort Mackinac after the sun set. In addition, the classic rifle and cannon firing demonstrations will both feature refreshed presentations.

“2024 will be an exciting year because we are continuing to expand the programs we offer as well as adding greater depth to our classic programs, creating a fun and educational experience for anyone

coming to Mackinac Island,” 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 2024 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](#).

The Mackinac Island State Park Visitor’s Center, located downtown, will also open May 3. Here guests can find all of the information for a perfect visit to Mackinac Island State Park, purchase tickets to Fort Mackinac, and shop at the official state park store.

Moving to Mackinaw City, construction is wrapping on the first new building at Colonial Michilimackinac since 2013. Located on the east end of the Southwest Rowhouse, the building will host a new exhibit, combining archaeological and archival research to help present community life at Michilimackinac in the 1700s: *Slavery at the Straits*. Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, slavery was integral part of the community at Michilimackinac, as well as the rest of Michigan. Enslaved Black and Native American men and women worked in all levels of society, doing everything from domestic work to skilled labor. Already a hub of the Great Lakes fur trade, Michilimackinac also served as the center of the regional trade in enslaved workers as French and British colonists exploited preexisting systems of Native American enslavement to feed a growing demand for enslaved labor.

“This new exhibit explores the lives of these enslaved individuals and how their experiences fit in with the larger story of Michilimackinac, allowing us to present a more complete vision of the site in the 18<sup>th</sup> century,” Brisson said.

Staying at Michilimackinac, the year 1781 will be explored, when local and global forces uprooted the entire community as soldiers and civilians relocated to Mackinac Island. After six decades as a thriving diplomatic and economic hub, Michilimackinac came to an end in 1781. A special daily program will go into detail on the end of Michilimackinac.

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; learn about the different architectural styles found at the fort; explore dining culture at a Merchant's House; 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 gorgeous setting and beautiful reconstruction of the 18<sup>th</sup> century fur trading village and fort overlooking the Straits of Mackinac are worth a visit for everyone that comes to Mackinaw City," said LeeAnn Ewer, Curator of Interpretation. "Here you will be able to explore and learn about what the last year of Michilimackinac was like for the soldiers and civilians that disassembled the community and moved to Mackinac Island. Our newest tour will highlight the move to the island, as well as the historic architecture that would have housed the community daily from Michigan weather as well as the occasional war."

The Mackinac State Historic Parks' archaeology program will enter its 66th season in 2024. 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 "Recent Excavations" display inside the Colonial Michilimackinac Visitor's Center.

Want to get closer than ever to the action at Colonial Michilimackinac? Guests have two opportunities to fire black powder weapons: 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](#).

Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, across the park from Colonial Michilimackinac, will see the continued restoration of the site to its 1910 appearance. This summer will see small details added to the

site, including a privy, pump, and flagpole. A small sidewalk will be added to the privy and pump, and, along with the oil house that was added in 2023, new interpretive signs will be added.

Programs at Historic Mill Creek feature daily demonstrations of a reconstructed 18<sup>th</sup> 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. Log hewing and pitsaw demonstrations will be relocated near the millpond, providing easier access and shaded seating for visitors of all ages. At the workshop historic farming programs highlight what life was like beyond the sawmill more than 200 years ago.

During the summer months, special themed weeks will dig deeper into the story of Historic Mill Creek. From June 23-29, enjoy “Wildlife Week at Historic Mill Creek,” featuring the amazing animals of the North Woods. From July 21-27, enjoy “Hay Cutters & Summer Pasture,” as programs explore historic hay making at the Straits of Mackinac. Finally, August 18-24 will feature “Lost Rocks & Mackinac Millstones,” where guests will learn about the grist mill at Mill Creek, and how the Mill Creek millstones were hewn from “lost rocks” deposited by glaciers thousands of years ago.

On the wild side, Historic Mill Creek’s 3.5 miles of interpreted hiking trails are always open and available to explore. During the summer months, join a trained naturalist at various times of the day for a guided walk along the trails, looking for blooming wildflowers, fruiting fungi, and singing birds among the trees, as well as for any wildlife along the banks of Mill Creek.

“We’re excited to enter a year of transition at Historic Mill Creek,” shared Park Naturalist Kyle Bagnall. “This year, special themed weeks will highlight aspects of the site’s amazing history. Guests can join a naturalist for short, guided trail walks. We’ll bask in the summer sun as we listen for the swish of the scythe and tales of historic hay cutters. Finally, we’ll join a hunt for “lost rocks” which traveled hundreds of miles thousands of years ago before landing at Mackinac.”

Historic Downtown Mackinac sites opening on May 10 include The Richard & Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum, Biddle House, featuring the Mackinac Island Native American Museum, and

Benjamin Blacksmith Shop. The other two buildings of Historic Downtown Mackinac, the American Fur Co. Store & Dr. Beaumont Museum and McGulpin House, will open June 1.

The Richard & Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum, located in Marquette Park in front of Fort Mackinac, will feature *Mackinac Rocks!*, a juried exhibition in the second floor changing gallery. From looking in wonder at the natural curiosity that is Arch Rock to skipping rocks at Windermere Point, to maybe enjoying some ‘rock’ at a local establishment or the fact that Mackinac Island is itself a large rock, it is safe to say that *Mackinac Rocks!*

An art attendant will lead guided tours of the galleries, including a look at the works of photographer William Gardiner and an exploration of souvenirs created on Mackinac Island. In addition, the attendant will lead two “Kids’ Time” crafts in the lower-level art studio.

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 and McGulpin House have both received new exhibits in the past two years. Admission to all of these sites is included with a Fort Mackinac or Historic Downtown Mackinac ticket.

Every museum store will feature new items inspired by the site they represent.

Most major projects were funded, in part, by Mackinac Associates. Visit [mackinacparks.com](http://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](http://www.mackinacparks.com).*

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