

Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

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Grandfather Mountain to celebrate 70th anniversary of Mile High Swinging Bridge

LINVILLE, N.C. – On Friday, Sept. 2, the Mile High Swinging Bridge at Grandfather Mountain, the not-for-profit nature park run by the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, will reach a major milestone. One of the most iconic destinations in North Carolina will be turning 70 years old, and the park is throwing a celebration with a mile-high slate of activities.

Whether it is guests' first time or 40th time crossing the Mile High Swinging Bridge, they are certain to find a new appreciation for one of the great engineering marvels on the East Coast as the park observes this anniversary with a special day of happenings.

"The Mile High Swinging Bridge is the crown jewel of Grandfather Mountain," Jesse Pope, president and executive director of the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, said. "For 70 years, the bridge has provided a wonderful and exciting experience for all our guests and has put Grandfather Mountain on the map as one of North Carolina's top destinations."

For decades, the bridge has also provided a dramatic backdrop for Grandfather's array of important educational programming, in which park naturalists and educators share the wonders of the mountain with guests.

From 10 a.m. through 3:30 p.m., naturalists and educators will present compelling programming about the mountain's extreme weather, high-elevation ecological communities, neighboring peaks and the history of the bridge, in addition to an opportunity for visitors to try their hand at constructing a bridge of their own (in the Classroom in the Clouds at the new Wilson Center for Nature Discovery).

Guests will be able to attend these fascinating talks on the second floor of the Top Shop and around the bridge itself throughout the day. Additionally, Hawk Watch will be going on at Linville Peak, where educators will be stationed to help visitors learn about the fall raptor migration.

"We're looking forward to sharing the joy and importance of the bridge with our guests, as we talk about the history of the bridge, the surrounding ecological communities and the importance of the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation's mission of inspiring conservation of the natural world," Cassie Petrilla, education specialist with the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, said. "We hope you will join us!"

Grandfather Mountain founder Hugh Morton had the bridge built in 1952, which marked the establishment of the park as it is known today. The construction of the bridge and the paved road to the top had been a dream of Morton's during his life and made the mountain's sweeping views and natural beauty accessible to everyone.

"The bridge is a testament to my father's vision," Catherine Morton, Hugh Morton's youngest daughter and board member of the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, said. "There were not many

economic drivers in the mountains of Western North Carolina at the time, and he perceived tourism as a growing industry that could create jobs for the people in the mountains.”

Former North Carolina Tourism Director Charles J. Parker coined the name “Mile High Swinging Bridge” at the bridge’s dedication in 1952, a nod to the structure’s elevation above sea level. The bridge is 228 feet long and spans an 80-foot chasm at more than a mile high. Meanwhile, the term “swinging” refers to the fact that suspension bridges are free to sway. The bridge provides easy access to Linville peak, along with dramatic 360-degree panoramic views of the surrounding mountains that spill over into Tennessee and Virginia.

Charles Hartmann Jr. of Greensboro, N.C., designed the original bridge. It was fabricated in Greensboro and then reassembled on top of Grandfather Mountain. Erecting the bridge took three weeks, a process slowed by inclement weather created by a hurricane off the North Carolina coast. The cost to design and construct the bridge was \$15,000. North Carolina Gov. William B. Umstead dedicated the bridge on Sept. 2, 1952.

In 1999, the bridge was rebuilt using the original towers. The cables, floorboards and side rails were all replaced using galvanized steel.

John Church, former maintenance manager for the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, recalled the work that was necessary to maintain the original bridge, which often involved hanging off the sides in order to paint or replace cables that broke off due to strong winds.

“We often used a rope that we would wrap around our waist or through our belt loops,” Church said. “For the I-beams, we would use a tall ladder and paint off of those, and then the rest of the bridge we would hang off and paint one railing at a time. The new bridge made our lives a bit easier. It was like day and night. We didn’t need to paint it or do much maintenance on it.”

The 70th anniversary celebration of the Mile High Swinging Bridge on Sept. 2 is included with the price of admission. To view the full schedule of events for the day, visit www.grandfather.com/70th-anniversary-of-the-mile-high-swinging-bridge.

To learn more about the Mile High Swinging Bridge, visit www.grandfather.com/visit/things-to-do/mile-high-swinging-bridge.

The nonprofit Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation strives to inspire conservation of the natural world by helping guests explore, understand and value the wonders of Grandfather Mountain. For more information, visit www.grandfather.com.

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Captions:

Swinging Bridge_Courtesy of Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation: On Friday, Sept. 2, the Mile High Swinging Bridge at Grandfather Mountain, the not-for-profit nature park run by the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, will reach a major milestone. One of the most iconic destinations in North Carolina will be turning 70 years old, and the park is throwing a celebration with a mile-high slate of activities, included with admission. (Photo Courtesy of Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation)

Bridge Aerial_Courtesy of Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation: From 10 a.m. through 3:30 p.m., naturalists and educators will present compelling programming about the mountain's extreme weather, high-elevation ecological communities, neighboring peaks and the history of the bridge, in addition to an opportunity for guests to try their hand at constructing a bridge of their own (in the Classroom in the Clouds at the new Wilson Center for Nature Discovery). (Photo Courtesy of Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation)

Far Tower Being Constructed in 1952_Photo by Hugh Morton_Courtesy of Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation: Grandfather Mountain founder Hugh Morton had the bridge built in 1952, which marked the establishment of the park as it is known today. The construction of the bridge and the paved road to the top had been a dream of Morton's during his life and made the mountain's sweeping views and natural beauty accessible to everyone. The bridge is 228 feet long and spans an 80-foot chasm at more than a mile high. The term "swinging" refers to the fact that suspension bridges are free to sway. The bridge provides easy access to Linville peak, along with dramatic 360-degree panoramic views of the surrounding mountains. (Photo Courtesy of Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation)