



Millstone Bluff Archaeological Site



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Traveling on State Hwy. 145, it's hard to miss the forest-covered hill of Millstone Bluff on the northwest side of the road.

This unique archaeological site rises 320 feet above the valley. The top of the mesa-like bluff is ringed by a broken sandstone escarpment. It is here Mississippian peoples (AD 1350-1550) built homes, carved their religion into the stone and buried their dead in stone box graves.

Stone Forts

Millstone Bluff also contains stone forts created by Late Woodland peoples (AD 600-900). These forts were built by constructing a stone wall across the easiest access points to the bluff. It is unclear whether enclosures were used as fortifications, ceremonial or community purposes.

Prehistoric Households

Archaeologists working at Millstone Bluff excavated portions of seven of about 26 houses on the bluff. Investigations revealed Mississippian peoples of Millstone Bluff lived in semi-subterranean (one half below the ground and one half above the ground) houses surrounding an open, central plaza. Houses varied in size and were constructed by digging rectangular basements in the ground. Timber posts were inserted into the excavated "wall" trenches and branches woven between posts — like weaving a basket. Finally, homes were packed with wet clay. The clay daub insulated the structure, making it warm in the winter and cool in the summer.

Houses were occupied for about 20 years. Houses that became vermin-infested were burned, and a new structure built to replace it. The pit left by the burned house was filled with village refuse, such as broken pottery, discarded stone tools and food remains. Today, the only visible signs of the ancient homes of the Mississippian peoples are round depressions atop the bluff.

Ancient Rock Art

Rock art — or petroglyphs — have been carved into sandstone on the northwest side of the bluff. Designs depict figures thought to be important in the religion of the Mississippian culture and to the identity of the Mississippian peoples living there. Figures include a falcon-like bird, an antlered serpent, human-like figures, crosses inside circles and other motifs. Archaeologists think Mississippians believed in a three-tiered universe: Under World, This World and Upper World. The Under World was inhabited by dangerous creatures, such as the Horned Serpent and Underwater Panther, while birds, particularly the falcon, belonged to the Upper World. Between these two worlds existed This World, where humans, plants and most animals lived. When viewed as a multi-panel work of art, petroglyphs may portray Mississippian cosmology.

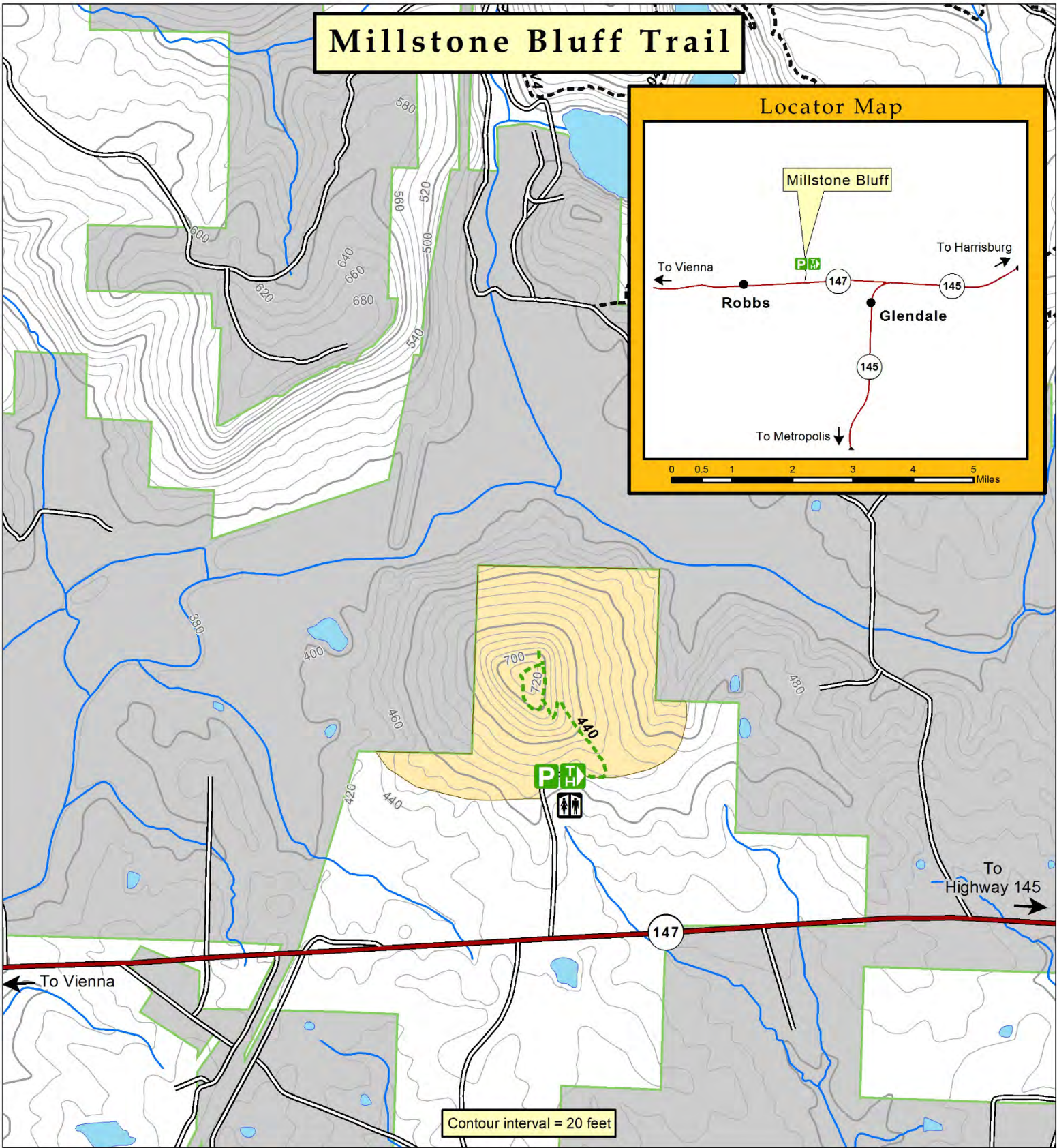
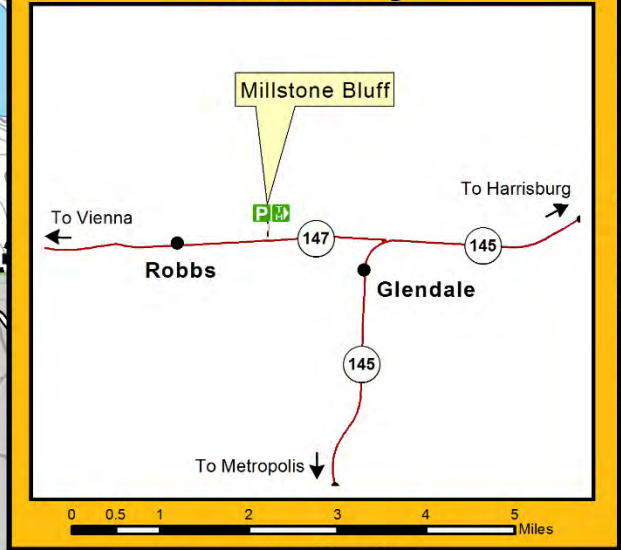
Stone Box Cemetery

Another important part of Mississippian life was preparation and interment of the dead. A specific area on the bluff top was designated as a cemetery where dead were placed in stone box graves. These graves were constructed with large stone slabs that formed a "box" that held the body and other important items, such as tools, pottery and food the deceased might need in the afterlife. Over the years, due to repeated vandalism and looting activity, all that remains are the empty stone box graves.



Millstone Bluff Trail

Locator Map



Contour interval = 20 feet

Legend

- Restroom
- Parking & Trailhead
- Hiker Only Trail
- Hiker/Equestrian Trail
- State Highway
- Road
- Stream
- Natural Area
- National Forest Land
- Non-National Forest Land

