



Millstone Bluff Archaeological Site



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

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.

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 and carved their religion into the stone.

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 actual fortifications, or for ceremonial and community purposes.

Prehistoric Households

Archaeologists working at Millstone Bluff excavated portions of seven of approximately 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.

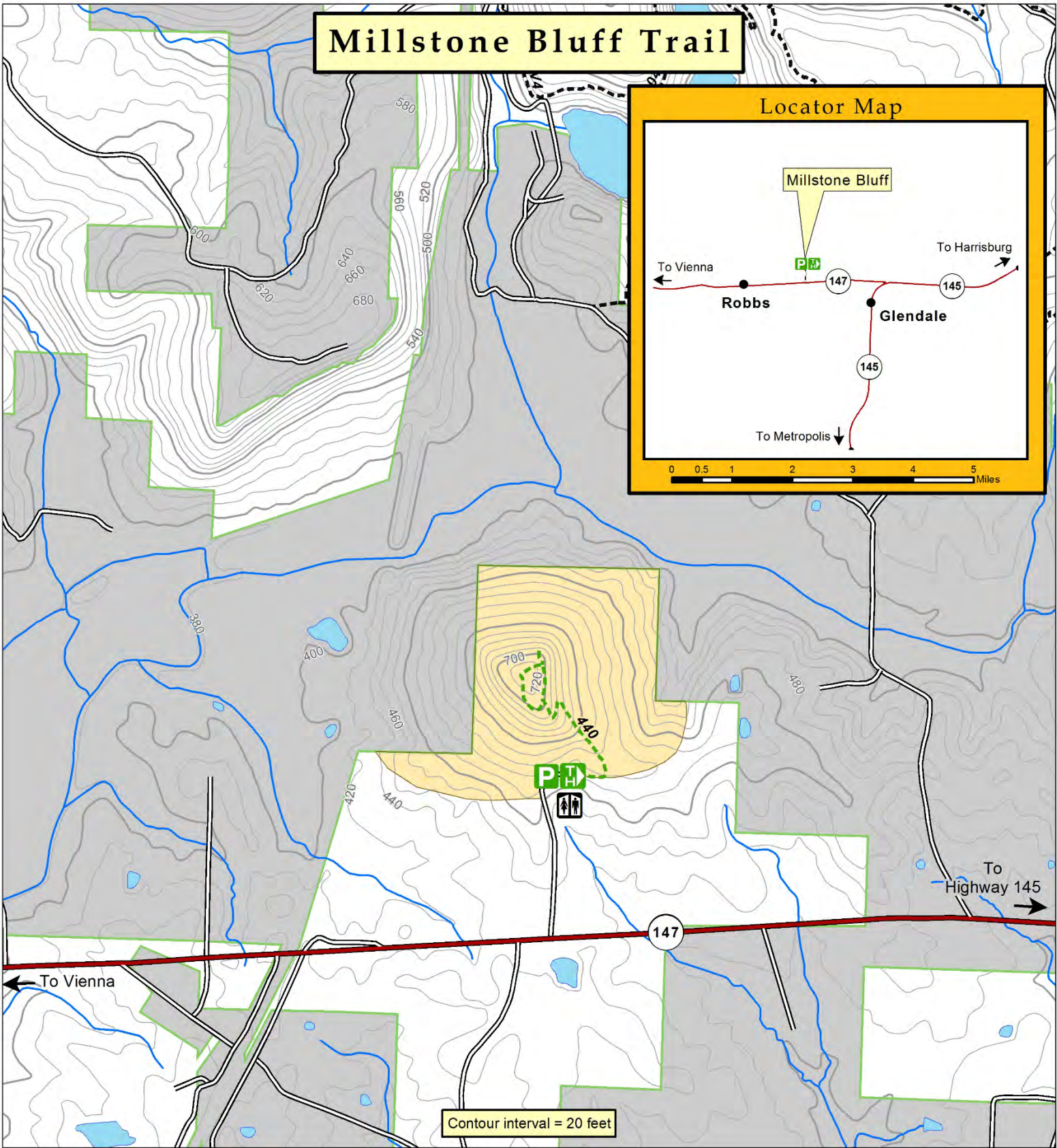
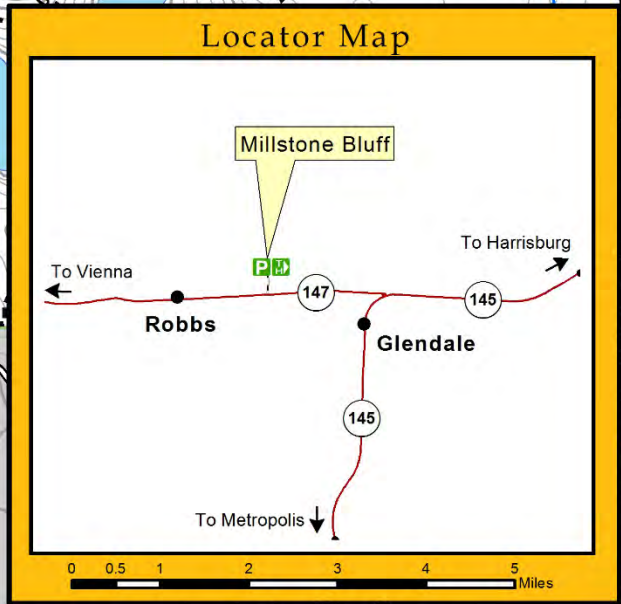
Ancient Rock Imagery

Rock imagery — 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 imagery, petroglyphs may portray Mississippian cosmology.



Millstone Bluff Trail

Locator Map



Legend

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

