



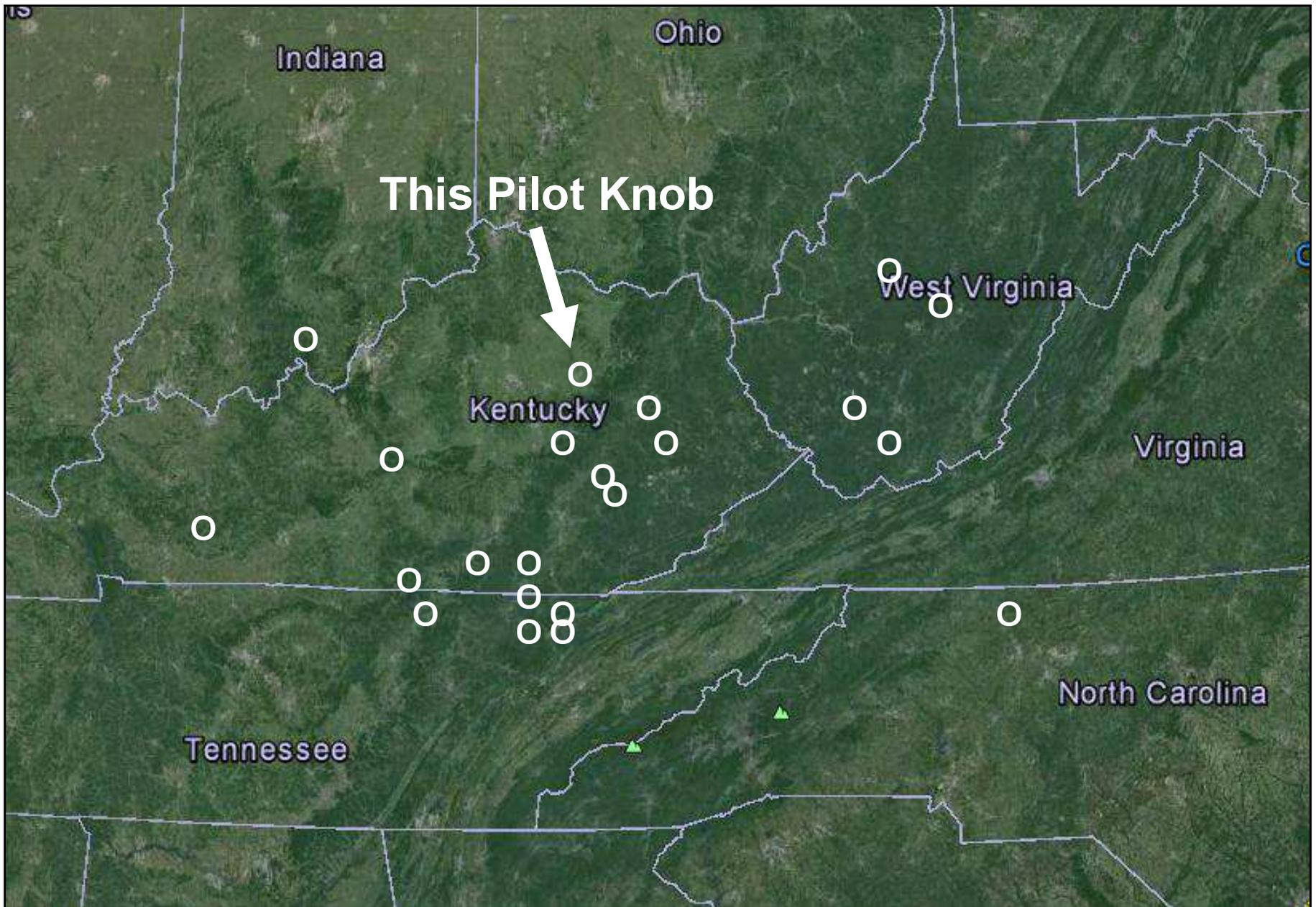
**Pilot Knob: New View  
of an Old Scene**

**Notes assembled at  
[bluegrasswoodland.com](http://bluegrasswoodland.com)**

**Pilot Knob of Powell County, Kentucky: New View of an Old Scene.** By Julian Campbell, with help of Joyce Bender, Harry Enoch, Charles Hockensmith, Larry Meadows & Timothy Weckman. [See shorter version in Red River Historical Society and Museum Newsletter 24: 5-13.]

Pilot Knob, of northwestern Powell County in Kentucky, is a remarkable place for at least five distinct reasons. Firstly, as its name implies, this is a particularly prominent hill along the line of knobs that runs from northeast to southwest in the transition from our Bluegrass plains to the Appalachian mountains. It appears to have been used for navigation by pioneering explorers such as John Findley, who showed Daniel Boone the way, and presumably by native peoples before them. Secondly, the thick beds of conglomerated gravel and sand in this knobs and others nearby became an important source of millstones during the early settlement of central Kentucky, between about 1790 and 1860. Thirdly, Pilot Knob—as in some adjacent knobs—displays a remarkable lack of limestone below its sandy cap, yet it does have a distinctly fertile patch of vegetation near its summit, suggesting some mysterious addition of calcium in the past. Historical use for camping or for growing fruit trees, and perhaps prehistoric uses by native peoples, may have enhanced the soil's fertility. Fourthly, there is a much more ancient geological story to be told about why limestone is lacking. The “Newman Limestone” of Mississippian age, which is well-known along most of the western Appalachian escarpment, appears to have been eroded out in places by subsequent rivers during the Pennsylvanian era. The conglomerate of Pilot Knob is part of these ancient river channels, cut down into the Mississippian rocks.

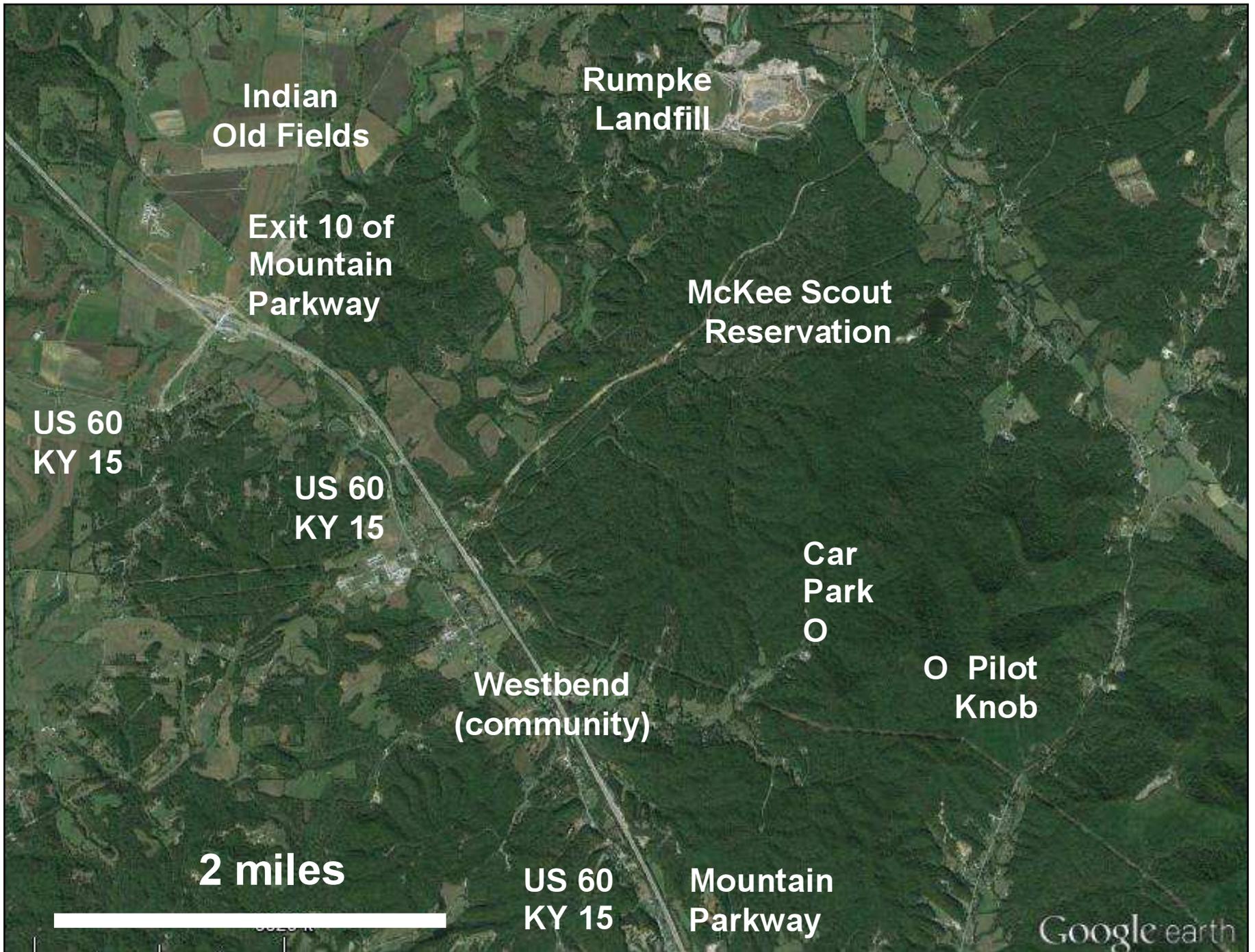
Finally, due to work of The Nature Conservancy and Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission since 1976 (with help from Ky. Heritage Land Conservation Fund), Pilot Knob is now part of a 742-acre preserve. Also, there is long-term potential to build a larger protected area in these hills, ideally extending east of KY 11 to Grape Knob and Morris Mountain.



Counties with “Pilot” place names from Google; “Knob” unless noted M = Mountain or Ri = Ridge or Ro = Rock. KY: Breathitt, Clay (M), Jackson (Ri), Madison, McCreary (Ro), Metcalfe, Powell, Todd (Ro), Wayne (Little PK), Wolfe. TN: Anderson (M), Clay, Morgan (M), Overton, Roane, Scott (Ro). IN: Harrison. NC: Surry (M), WV: “2” “1” “A” “Central”

As noted by Joyce Bender (2012): “Fall is a perfect time to visit Pilot Knob State Nature Preserve in Powell County. It is a favorite place for history and geology buffs as well as hikers... The climb is just challenging enough to get your heart pumping, and the view from the 730-foot elevation is fabulous when the skies are clear. Fall colors pop like a crazy quilt and spring’s softer pastels of pink and rose and chartreuse look like a watercolor painting. The trail system offers several choices for exploring the preserve. The 2.5-mile round-trip hike to the summit along the Oscar Gerald’s Jr. Trail is considered moderately strenuous due to the elevation gain. The view is worth the hike! The Sage Point Trail is a 2.0-mile loop trail that departs mid-slope from the Gerald’s Trail. It climbs and descends an adjacent knob known as Sage Point, and takes hikers to a stream at the bottom of a ravine before ascending to a saddle between Rotten Point and Pilot Knob and reconnecting to the Gerald’s Trail nearer to the summit. It is considered very strenuous. A quarry site with several unfinished millstones is located on Pilot Knob’s lower slope and can be seen along the 0.5-mile easy-to-moderate Millstone Quarry Trail.”

The new exit (Number 10) from the Bert. T. Combs Mountain Parkway offers tourists even quicker access to this significant site. Although increased attention can lead to problems (such as unofficial trails, vandalism and trash), it is important that citizens of Kentucky—and visitors to our state—visit Pilot Knob to appreciate the place and deepen their understanding of our history, both natural and human. Exit 10 also leads directly to the site of “Indian Old Fields”, where the last native American village of Kentucky existed during the 1750s, named “Eskippakithiki.” There is much historical and ecological interest attached to that site, as well as Pilot Knob, and a more complete account is still warranted. It is amazing to consider that 3500 acres or more, around that village, appears to have been maintained as grassland before Virginian settlement—grassland that was presumably maintained by browsing and burning.



Indian  
Old Fields

Rumpke  
Landfill

Exit 10 of  
Mountain  
Parkway

McKee Scout  
Reservation

US 60  
KY 15

US 60  
KY 15

Car  
Park  
○

○ Pilot  
Knob

Westbend  
(community)

2 miles

US 60  
KY 15

Mountain  
Parkway

Google earth

## Early Explorers from Virginia

One of the earliest Virginian explorers in what became Kentucky, Christopher Gist, appears to have passed close to Pilot Knob in 1751 and may even have ascended it. As transcribed by Johnson (1898, p. 150-151), on March 18th, Gist passed near Pilot Knob or some other knobs in Montgomery or Powell County between “Salt Lick Creek” [Licking River] and “Little Cuttaway River” [probably Red River]. “After I had determined not to go to the Falls [of Ohio River]; We turned from Salt Lick Creek to a Ridge of Mountains that made towards the Cuttaway River, and from the Top of that Mountains we saw a fine level Country S W as far as Our Eyes could behold and it was a very clear day; We then went down the mountain and set out S 20 W about 5 M[iles], thro rich level land covered with small Walnut, Sugar trees, Red-buds &c.”

It is often assumed, however, that Virginians first encountered Pilot Knob in the 1760s. The following words were attributed by John Filson (1784) to Daniel Boone, based on the experience of Boone, John Finley, John Stewart and others during 1769 in the vicinity of modern Powell County, probably including the famous Pilot Knob in Powell County: “...on the seventh day of June following we found ourselves on Red river, where John Findlay [sic] had formerly been trading with the Indians [presumably at Eskipakithiki], and from the top of an eminence [presumably Pilot Knob], saw with pleasure the most beautiful level of Kentucky... We found everywhere abundance of wild beasts of all sorts, through this vast forest. The buffaloes were more frequent than I have seen cattle in the settlements, browsing on the leaves on the cane, or cropping the herbage on those extensive plains, fearless, because ignorant, of the violence of man. Sometimes we saw hundred in a drove, and the numbers about the salt springs were amazing. In this forest, the habitation of beasts of every kind natural to America, we practised hunting with great success, until the 22<sup>d</sup> day of December following.”



The Draper Manuscripts (at Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison) contain more specific references to Pilot Knob in Powell County. Following are some quotations from interviews of the Reverend John Shane with pioneers in the 1840s, when they described early times in Kentucky.

**William & Polly Risk** (11CC 86-90): “The road [from Winchester] was out through the cane then, out to the stone quarry. Stone quarry road. Mill stones had been cut out in the Knobs before I came out here [in 1793]... There were five partners [in the quarry]. Cuthbert and Benjamin Combs, Benjamin Berry, and the two Calmes. They entered into partnership in Battletown, Frederick County, Virginia. Agreed to divide according to quality and quantity and share expenses. They first landed in this part of the country on the top of Pilot Knob. They had gotten lost and gotten off of the waters of Licking on to the waters of Red River. Some wanted to go back on to the Licking, but when they saw the level country below the Knob, they decided to go there.”

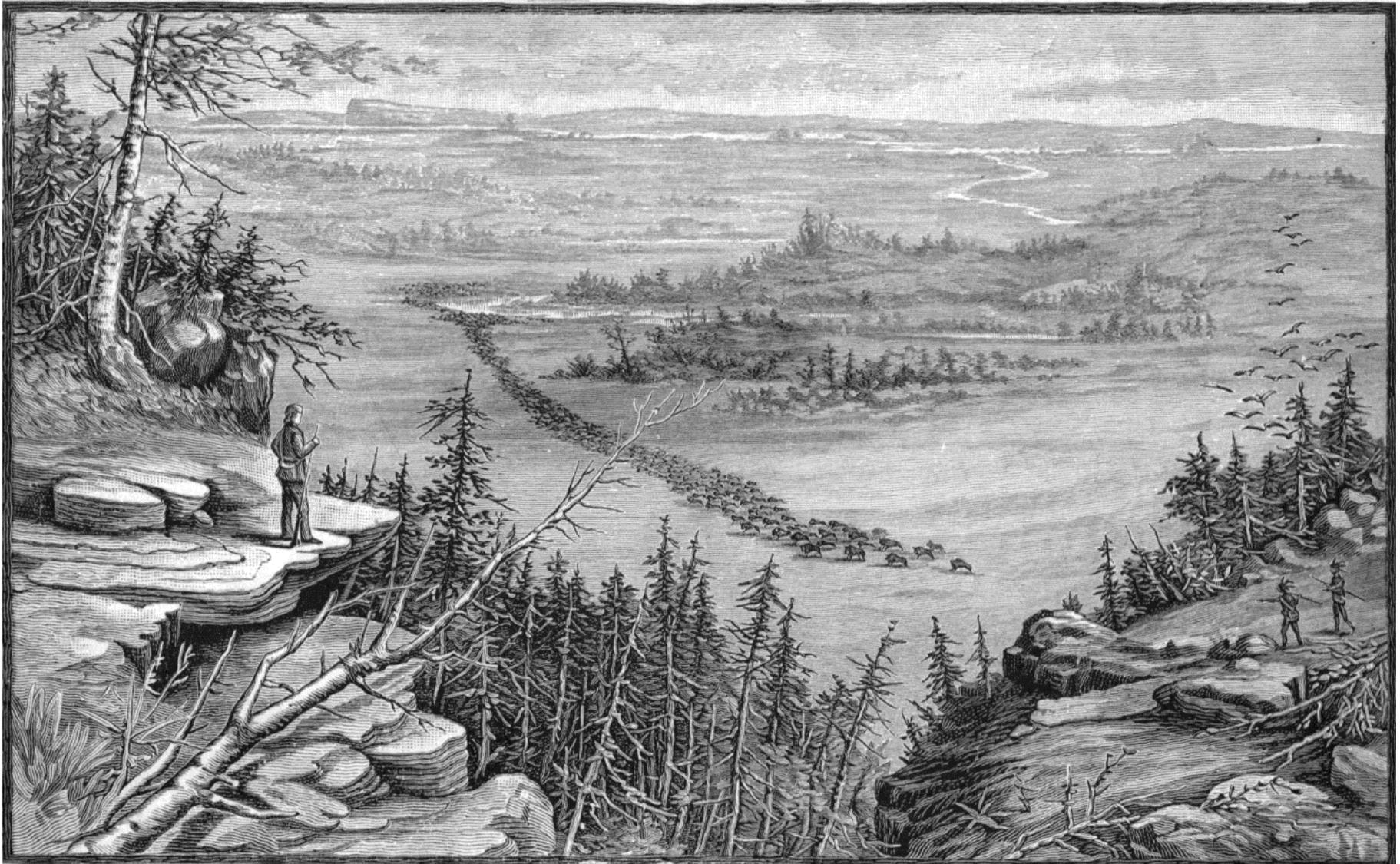
**Jesse Daniel** (11CC 92-95): “Some three or four years after I came up here [1801] and previous to the late war [1812-15], three Indians, one very old and two younger that were said to be his grandsons, came about here. An old Indian, very grey. Tallest Indian I ever saw. No spare flesh about this Indian. They came up through Bourbon, up Grassy Lick and by my place here. Twas said by those who were—might have been—with them that as soon as they came in view of the Pilot Knob, they gave great demonstrations of joy. My idea was there had been a town there... Visited several licks about there. Seemed to know them all. I soon found by his chat, he seemed to be acquainted with the ground he was on. They were Shawnees. I was there with them some the night they camped there. The next day or perhaps longer off, they went on to Red river, about the Pilot Knob. No person comprehended the object of their visit, and they

departed again as they came in, leaving the whole subject involved in the deepest mystery... The Pilot Knob was a knob that when you got on it, the whole country appeared level. I have always understood that that was the knob Boone first stood on in Kentucky.”

**Nancy Hedges Goff** (11CC 97-98): “Before I came up [1792], I had heard the people say that from the top of the Pilot Knob they could see the tin cups hanging out before the store doors at Lexington. When Mr. Gough and I rode up as far as we could, we then walked. When we got on the Knob, I asked him where the tin cups were. He laughed and said I could only see as far as my eyes would let me. I could see from Pilot Knob our corn stacks. Could only see the upper end of our place, not where the house is. We can see the light of the furnace from here, which is 17 or 18 miles off [Bourbon Furnace SE of Owingsville] and in a still time, before rain, we can hear the hammer at the forge, 7 miles off [probably at Camargo].”

**Septimus Scholl** (11CC 51-53): “Grandson of Daniel Boone. The following is a piece Schull said he had written out for his children, placed it at my [John Shane’s] disposal. Grammar and structure of sentences amended: “When Colonel Boone with his associates had mounted the most commanding position of Kentucky and viewed the numerous herds of Buffaloe, Elk and Deer on the plains below, he observed to his comrades to ‘behold!’, claiming the whole as their own, at the same time exclaiming, ‘We are as rich as Boaz of old, having the cattle of a thousand hills.’”

Boone seems to have mixed his Biblical metaphors. Ruth (3:7): “And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.” Psalm (50:10): “For all the animals of the forest are mine, and I [God] own the cattle on a thousand hills.”



“Daniel Boone looks out upon Kentucky and a great herd of buffalo”; probably at Pilot Knob, looking down upon the 3500 acres of Indian Old Fields. Engraving by unknown artist, supposedly from Z.F. Smith’s 1895 History of Kentucky. However, downloaded versions of this book do not appear to contain this image. See also Belue (1996).

## Millstone Quarrying

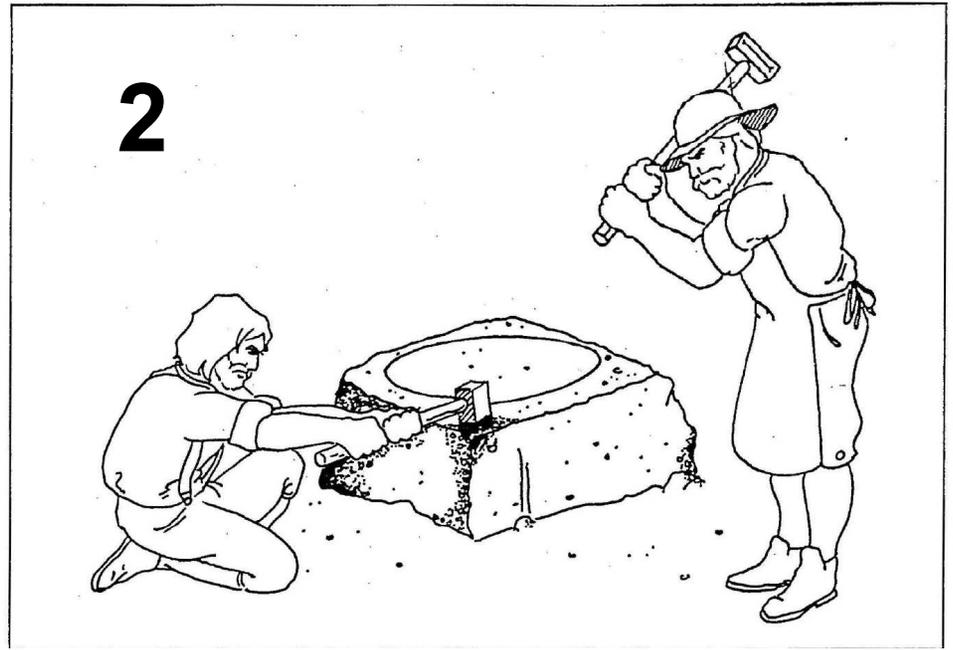
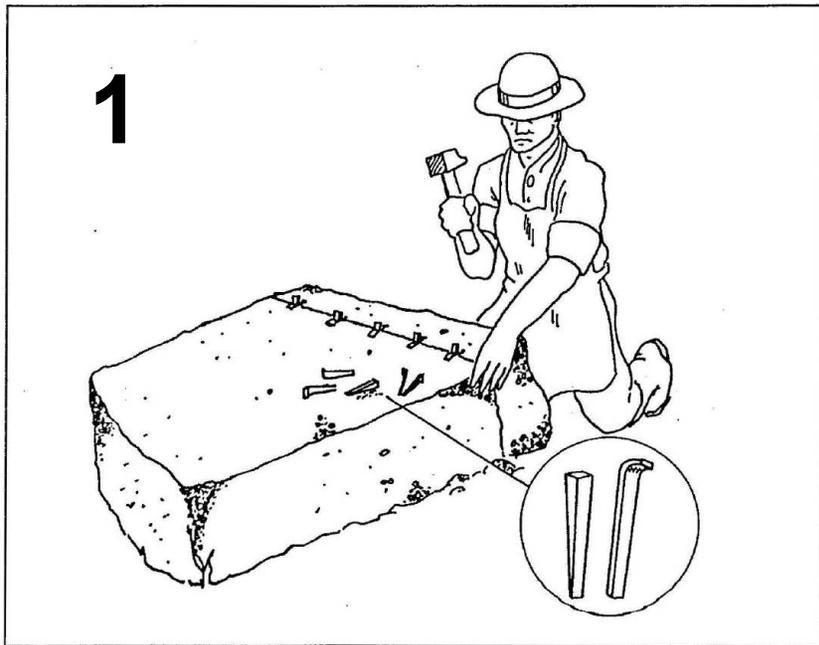
Hockensmith (2009) has produced a thorough review of information about this old industry in Kentucky, with special attention to the quarries in Powell County: “Very little has been written about the millstone quarries of Kentucky. Most available information consists of brief statements published in early geological reports and history books. Millstone quarries were located in Franklin, Letcher, Logan, Madison, McCreary, Marshall, Powell, Rockcastle, Whitley, and Woodford counties. Additional quarries may have existed in Logan County and many other counties that have adequate stone. Since the early geologists did not describe the millstone quarries, the industry may have been in decline by 1854 when the Kentucky Geological Survey was established. It is also possible that the early geologists felt that millstone quarrying was such a minor industry that they did not take time to report on it...”

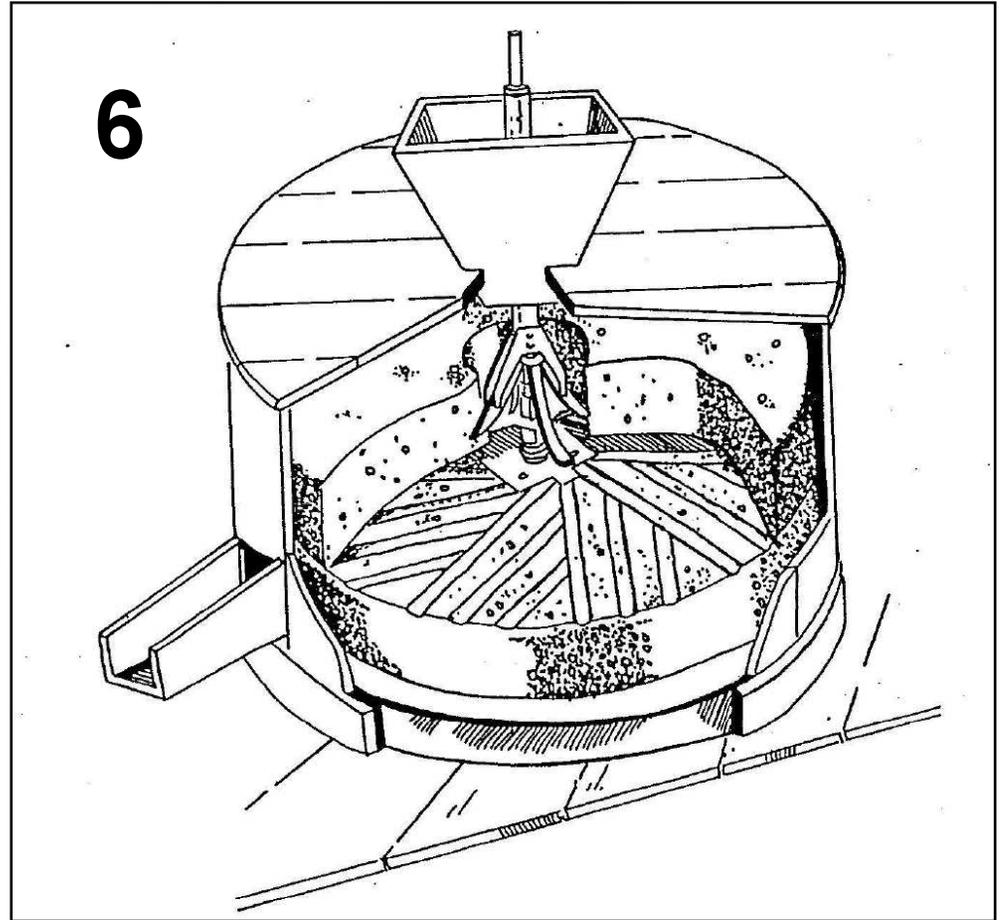
Following are extracts from Hockensmith & Meadows (1996), who detailed the quarries of Pilot Knobs and nearby. “During the late 18th century and throughout the 19th century, hundreds of Kentucky grist mills ground wheat, corn, and other grains into flour and meal. The millstones used in early mills were either imported from Europe (Hockensmith 1994: 16) or from quarries in nearby states. However, transportation was difficult in the rugged and remote areas of Kentucky. To provide millstones for local markets, quarries were opened in Powell and other counties that possessed suitable stone. This paper provides an overview of the archaeological investigations conducted at six millstone quarries in the Knobs region of Powell County. As early as the 1790s, monolithic millstones were being quarried from conglomerate deposits at these quarries. On the basis of observations made on discarded millstones and accounts of millstone making, a manufacturing sequence is presented for millstones produced in Powell County....”

“Millstones are large, round disk-shaped stones used for grinding grain and other materials. Two stones were used in the grinding process. The lower stone (bedstone) remained stationary while the upper stone (runner) was turned by an iron shaft running through the center of the stone [see Figures]. Grooves or furrows were carefully cut into the grinding surface of each stone to facilitate the grinding process. In addition to providing sharp cutting edges, the grooves also moved the grain (fed through the central hole) from the center to the edge of the stone where it was collected. The flour or meal accumulated inside the wooden housing surrounding the millstones. A small chute carried the flour from the wooden housing to bags...”

“The millstone maker's hard labor was not always fruitful. At any time during the manufacturing process, a critical mistake could be made or a flaw uncovered that ruined the millstone. Sometimes a careless blow or a small seam in the rock would result in the edges of the millstone being severely damaged. In other instances, the stone would break in an irregular manner when being separated from the parent rock. At other times the millstone would survive until the eye was cut and then the rock would crack or split. Regardless of the cause, a rejected millstone resulted in days of lost labor and much frustration. Once the millstone maker completed a set of matching stones, they were ready for the customer. The millstones were probably hauled from the quarry on a sled and then loaded onto a heavy duty wagon for transport to the customer. The furrows were added by a millwright at the mill...”

“It is suspected that the six quarries represent only a sample of those present in northwest Powell County. Since the knobs are very rugged and heavily vegetated, a great deal of time and effort will be required to explore the numerous little valleys dissecting this area. Undoubtedly, additional millstone quarries will come to light as this portion of Powell County is intensively surveyed. Hopefully, the study of additional quarries will enhance our understanding of millstone quarrying.”





Drawings first published in Hockensmith & Meadows (1996); the artist is Gary Adams of Winchester, Kentucky. Original captions are as follows (with new numbers). 1. A worker using wedges and fetters to split a boulder. Note the close-up view of the wedge (left) and the fetter (right) inserted into the drill hole. 2. Workers removing the excess stone from a millstone preform. Man on the left is holding a bullset while the man on the right is preparing to strike the bullset with a sledge hammer. to remove the angular corner. 3. Worker leveling the upper surface of a millstone with a leveling staff and hammer. 4. Worker using a hammer and chisel to straighten the side of a millstone. Note the square on the ground. 5. Worker carefully chiseling the eye (or central hole) into an otherwise complete millstone. 6. Cutaway drawing showing how millstones are mounted for grinding grain.

## **Patterns in Soils and Vegetation; with Edaphic and Historic Mysteries**

The soils, vegetation and flora of the Pilot Knob area have been described in several scientific reports, as detailed by Weckman et al. (2003). In brief, the predominant pattern is a gradient in forest types from lowlands to uplands, as follows.

1. Riparian woods on active floodplains: typified by sycamore and river birch.
2. Low woods on terraces and toeslopes: sweetgum, tulip-tree, red maple, some oaks.
3. Oak-hickory woods on average slopes: white oak, black oak, some hickories.
4. Chestnut oak woods on dry sandy soils: chestnut oak, scarlet oak, formerly chestnut.
5. Oak-pine woods on drier or more disturbed sites: shortleaf pine, Virginia pine, some oaks.

In addition there are minor areas with more mesic forest (with relatively little dryness and wetness), especially on north/east-facing slopes. More open woods and grassland are restricted to small areas of wet meadow in old fields and powerlines, drier grassland along powerlines and roadsides, and open rocky sites along narrow ridges and summits.

But as well as this overall hydrological gradient, there are more local patterns related to soil chemistry. Because there is no limestone on Pilot Knob, more base-rich soil series (alfisols such as Bledsoe and Westbend) are less distinct from the more acid soils that predominate in these hills (mostly ultisols such as Carpenter and Jessietown). Below the sandstone outcrops, there is virtually no evidence of increased base-status in soils and vegetation. There is, however, a remarkable small concentration of basiphilous species on Pilot Knob, mostly along the east-facing ascent and north side of the summit, set back from the more pronounced sandstone cliffs. Black locust, white ash, white elm, mulberry, hackberry and walnut are characteristic of such sites on Pilot Knob, Grape Knob, Kit Point or Rotten Point. Several additional associated shrubs, ferns, herbs and graminoids are listed by Weckman et al. (2003).

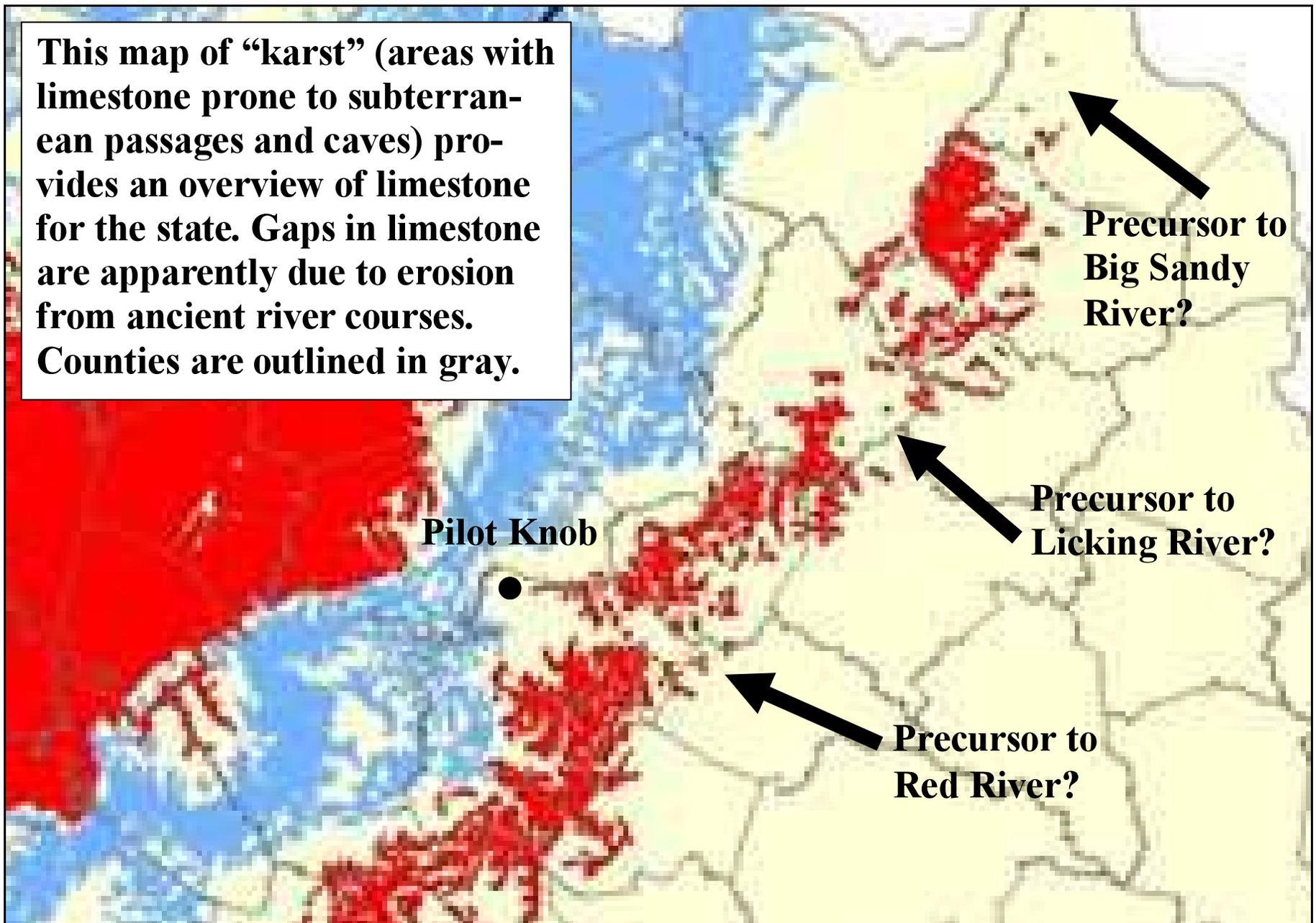


Examples of rare wildflowers of the Pilot Knob area that would benefit from more open woods or grassland, using fire in appropriate places: prairie phlox (left) and crested coral-root (right). Images from [http://www.thismia.com/P/Phlox\\_pilosa1.jpg](http://www.thismia.com/P/Phlox_pilosa1.jpg) and [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/29/Hexalectris\\_spicata\\_\(16977585464\).jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/29/Hexalectris_spicata_(16977585464).jpg)

Further examination of soil and vegetation is needed in order to interpret this evidence of more base-rich conditions on these summits. Such conditions may be attributed to human influences, perhaps over 100s or 1000s of years. It is known that a small peach orchard was established on Pilot Knob before 1950; possibly lime was hauled up to this site. Moreover, native people may well have previously increased the fertility of this site through continual camping, burning, accumulation of calcium in bones and shells, and other foraging. Similar apparent changes in soils have been observed on sandstone knobs at other sites in Kentucky where ancient human use is known: including Indian Hill in Edmonson County (SW side of Mammoth Cave National Park); and the knob just south of Mantle Rock in Livingston County.

Although openings are currently restricted to rock outcrops, roadsides, powerlines, old fields and streamsides, there were more extensive openings on some lowlands before settlement. There is historical evidence that the “Indian Old Fields” covered up to 3500 acres on the ancient terraces and flats about 2-3 miles to the west (Filson 1784, Draper 1842-56, Beckner 1932, 1953). Several somewhat conservative grassland species still occur around Pilot Knob, and may well indicate remnants of former grassland that extended upwards from lower slopes and flats. Those typical of moderately deep well-drained soils (not restricted to xeric or hydric sites) include crested coralroot, blazing stars, prairie phlox, smooth blue aster and waxy meadow rue (Weckman et al. 2003). Currently, there is no program to restore grasslands on these lowlands among the eastern Knobs. The former “Old Fields” area is intensively farmed and no remnants of native grassland are known there. More detailed biological survey of this area, and deeper links with the community, are needed in order to explore the potential for restoration, perhaps on some tracts between Pilot Knob and the Old Fields. It would be reasonable, at least, to establish some native grassland at the new intersection of the Mountain Parkway and Route 974.

**This map of “karst” (areas with limestone prone to subterranean passages and caves) provides an overview of limestone for the state. Gaps in limestone are apparently due to erosion from ancient river courses. Counties are outlined in gray.**

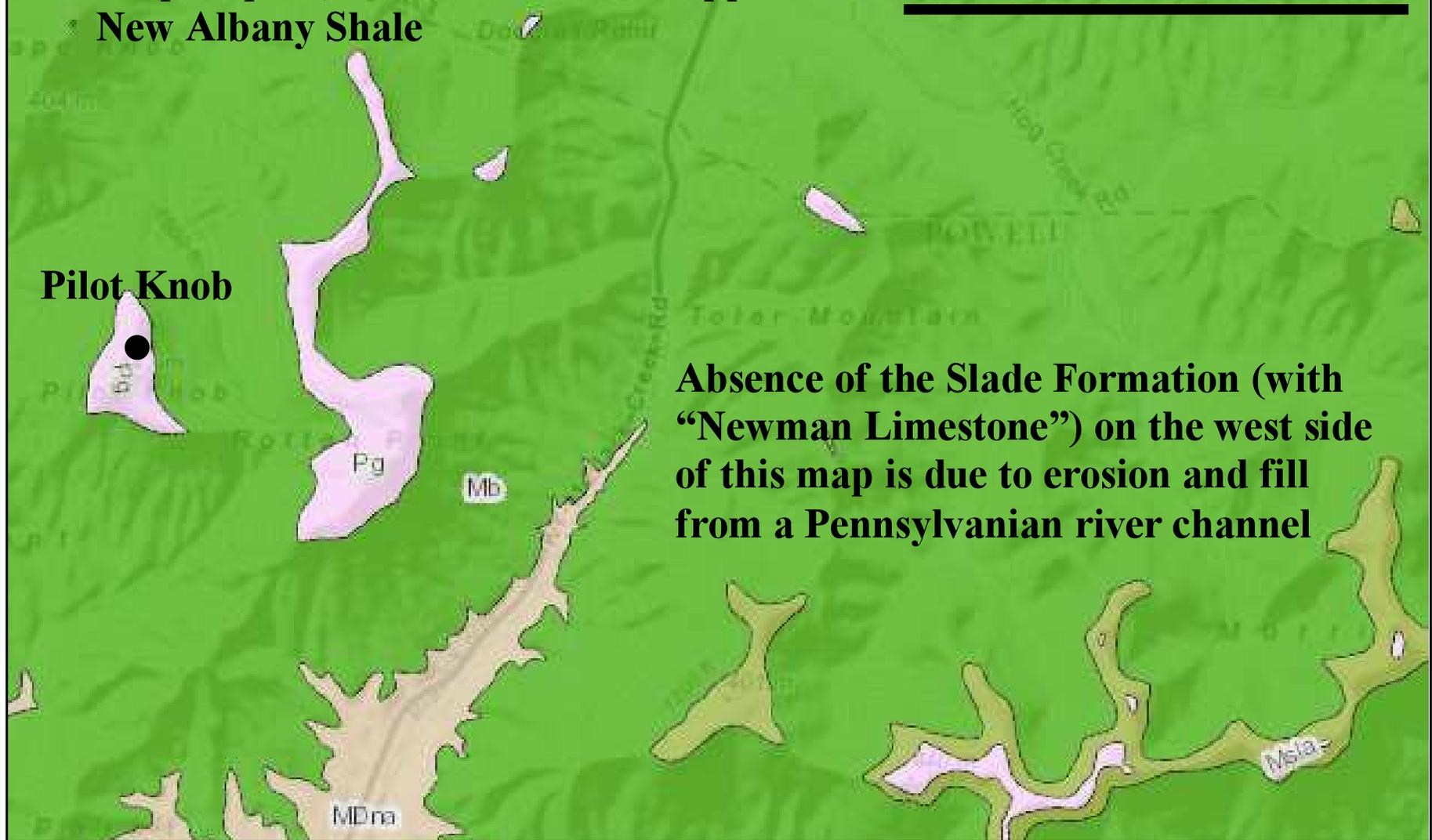


Annotations on base-map: “Karst Areas of Kentucky” (Ky. Geol. Surv.): red = high karst; blue = moderate karst. <[http://images.slideplayer.com/8/1347208/slides/slide\\_8.jpg](http://images.slideplayer.com/8/1347208/slides/slide_8.jpg)>

**Pg (bright pink) = Pennsylvanian, Lee Formation**  
**Msla (pale green) = Mississippian, Slade Formation**  
**Mb (green) = Mississippian, Borden Formation**  
**MDna (pale pink) = Devonian-Mississippian**  
**New Albany Shale**

Mb

1 mile



**Absence of the Slade Formation (with “Newman Limestone”) on the west side of this map is due to erosion and fill from a Pennsylvanian river channel**

Geological map of Pilot Knob area [from <http://kgs.uky.edu/kgsmap/kgsgeoserver/viewer.asp>]

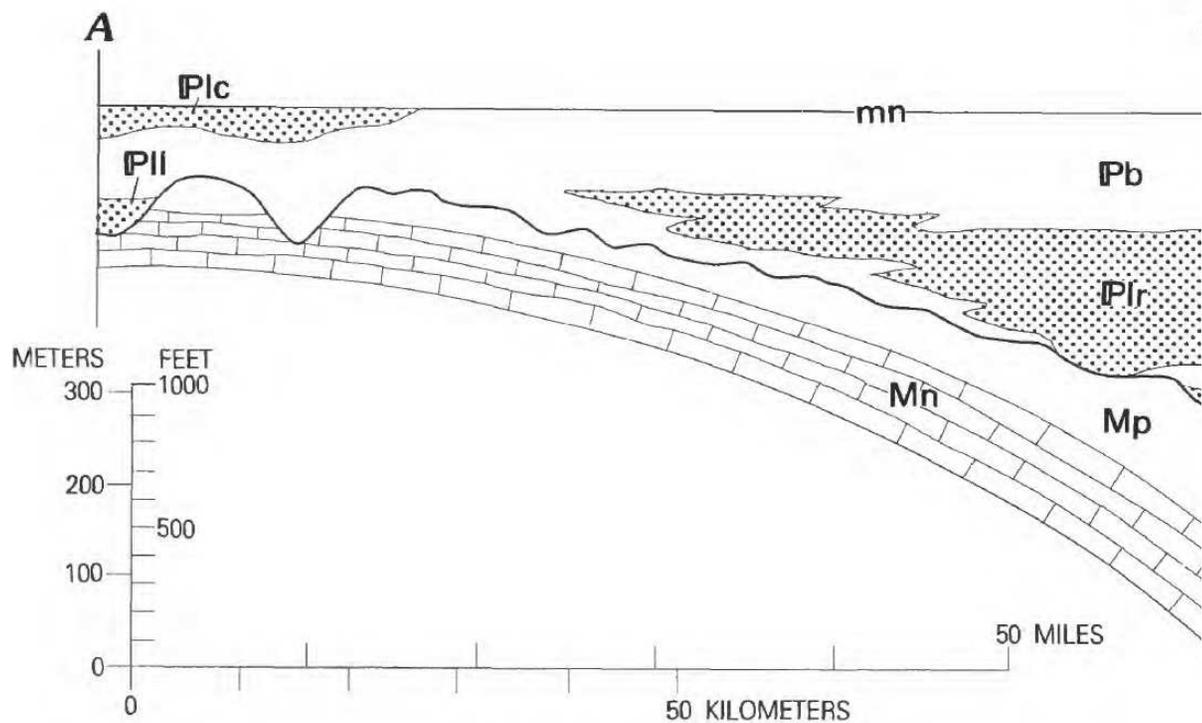
## **Geology: Reason for the Remarkable Absence of Limestone**

The Lee Formation forms the summit of these knobs (McDowell 1978): “Sandstone, quartzose, mostly conglomeratic, light-gray, weathers light brown; locally limonite stained; fine to medium grained; pebbles rounded white, gray, or pink quartz, mostly range from 1/8 inch to 1 inch across, most abundant in lower part of unit; pebbly beds about 125 feet thick on Pilot Knob; beds mostly a few inches thick or less, conspicuously crossbedded in sets several feet thick. Contains sparse casts of large plant remains as much as several feet long. Large angular chert fragments occur locally in lowermost few feet of unit on Rotten Point and ridges to the north; chert brownish-red to gray, fragments as much as 10 inches long. Unit forms cliffs and very steep slopes; basal contact sharp, commonly exposed where unit overlies limestone, covered where it overlies siltstone or shale; unconformity at base cuts as low as the upper part of the Cowbell Member of the Borden Formation on Pilot Knob and Rotten Point. Unit apparently equivalent to sandstones and conglomerates of the Lee Formation in the Clay City quadrangle, adjacent on the south (Simmons, 1967), and of the Breathitt and Lee Formations in the Means quadrangle, adjacent on the east (Weir, 1976).”

Absence of limestone is attributable to erosion by an ancient river course, depositing pebbles into old channels that later became concreted with lime and other minerals. Just 1-2 miles further east on Morris Mountain, limestone is about 80 feet thick (1300-1380 ft above sea level). Below the conglomerate, forming most of the surface, is the Lower Mississippian Borden Formation. The Borden, from upper to lower, is composed of the Nada Member (mostly greenish-gray; shale and siltstone), Cowbell Member (gray, weathering to yellowish or reddish brown; siltstone and shale), and Nancy & Farmers Members (bluish or greenish gray, weathering to reddish, orange or yellowish; shale, siltstone and thin beds of sandstone). The latter contains “ironstone concretions several inches across, especially in lower part of unit.”

Rice and Weir (1984:30) stated that conglomerate deposits of the Lee Formation “are thought to be remnants of a southwest-trending drainage system that extended from Ohio across central Kentucky into the Eastern Interior basin in western Kentucky.” The authors described the making of these channel fills as follows: “In the northern part of the belt, outcrops of older paleozoic sedimentary and metamorphic rocks yielded quartz sand and gravel that were carried to the southwest by rivers that drained the region. As the volume of sediment increased, the streams filled their channels, became braided, and spread out across their flood plains” (Rice and Weir 1984:43)... By the Middle Pennsylvanian time, the remnants of the channels and their fills were buried by finer grained sediments from what was probably more easterly or southeasterly sources” (Rice and Weir 1984:42). Today, the Pennsylvanian age channel deposits survive only as caps on the tops of knobs. Elsewhere, erosion has destroyed these ancient channel deposits. In Powell County, intact conglomerate deposits are restricted to the tops of a few knobs. Nearby, ridges and slopes sometimes contain large conglomerate boulders that may represent erosional remnants of these deposits. It is assumed that the more resistant conglomerate deposits dropped vertically as the softer underlying shales eroded away over thousands of years (Hockensmith 2009).

Reid & Weir indicated that the Pilot Knob conglomerate is more or less equivalent to the “Livingston Conglomerate Member of the Lee Formation”—which exhibits a more extensive channel between Berea and Livingston. They provided a hypothesis for how “paleovalleys” crossed central Kentucky during the Pennsylvanian era, leaving these channel deposits. The following diagrams are taken from their report, which should be consulted for more detailed explanation. Their Figure 18 shows at left the Livingston Conglomerate cut into the Newman Limestone, with the more recent Corbin Sandstone above (which is especially thick in the Red River Gorge). Their Figure 32 maps the “Sharon-Brownsville Paleovalley System.”



**EXPLANATION**

MISSISSIPPIAN PENNSYLVANIAN	Pb	Breathitt Formation
	mn	Manchester coal bed
	Phn	Hance Formation
		Lee Formation
	PIIc	Corbin Sandstone Member
	PIr	Rockcastle Conglomerate Member
	PII	Livingston Conglomerate Member
	PIbr	Bee Rock Sandstone Member
	PIh	Hensley Member
	PIm	Middlesboro Member
	PMId	Dark Ridge Sandstone Member
	MIw	White Rocks Sandstone Member
	MIp	Pinnacle Overlook Member
	Mp	Pennington Formation
Mn	Newman Limestone	

Figure 18 of Reid & Weir (1984), here cropped at right.

Schematic cross section showing relations of major members of the Lee Formation in eastern Kentucky [from near Berea =A towards the southeast].

Datum is top of Corbin Sandstone Member of the Lee Formation or base of overlying Manchester coal bed of the Breathitt Formation.

Heavy line is Mississippian-Pennsylvanian unconformity

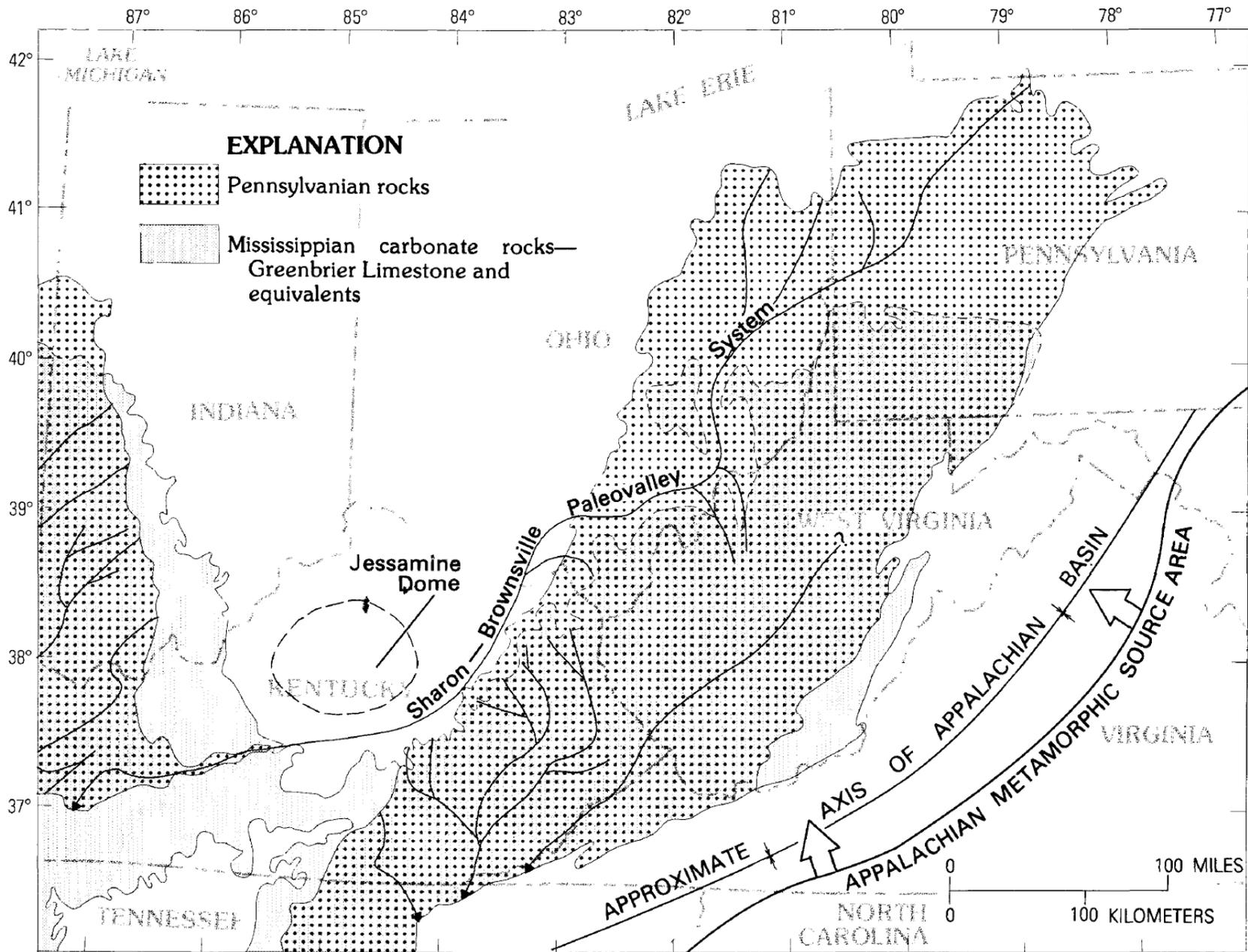


FIGURE 32.—Map of Kentucky, Ohio, West Virginia, and parts of adjacent states showing the inferred Late Mississippian-Early Pennsylvanian drainage system in which channel-fill quartzose sandstone and conglomerate were deposited. (Compare data shown in figures 4, 13, and 31).

## **Returning to the Pilot: Whence and Whereto?**

So what routes, exactly, were involved by users of Pilot Knob before Virginian settlement? If we speculate, it seems likely that the relatively open plains and dolomitic foothills west of the Knobs, with much grassland and brush, were easy to get lost in. This relatively open zone extended from western Lewis County to northern Lincoln County, and it was probably much used for hunting. Much of it became used as the “Warrior’s Path” between Shawnee towns in southeast Ohio and Cherokee country along upper Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers. Filson’s (1784) map shows this path from the north passing near Pilot Knob then crossing the Red River and Kentucky River to continue southeast up Station Camp Creek.

It was obviously important to start at known places along the edge of these mountains when entering that rugged landscape from the west. By looking up at distinctive skylines, travellers would recognize ancient landmarks such as Pilot Knob, and sometimes climbed them. It is probably no accident that the two earliest Virginian explorers to leave a record—Thomas Walker in 1750 and Christopher Gist in 1751—both turned east into the mountains between Red River and Kentucky River, as shown on Johnston’s (1898) map extracted above. Gist came from the north, having crossed the Ohio near the mouth of the Scioto, then turned back east, probably near Blue Licks. Walker came from the south, having wandered through very difficult country to emerge briefly from the mountains down Station Camp Creek to the Kentucky River. Although we still do not have an exact reconstruction of these two explorers’ routes, it is likely that they both sought to follow east-west trails established by native americans

Little did they know that were going not just “up river” in the current landscape. They were also skirting massive deposits of gravel and sand that were laid down about 300 million years before by ancient rivers from the east, eroding down the original Appalachian core.



**From Clay  
City Times,  
June 12th,  
1969.**

**At Pilot Knob  
on Daniel  
Boone Day,  
June 7th.**

**Archie  
Godwin (L),  
Larry  
Meadows,  
Dr. R.A.  
Taylor \*,  
Ralph  
Marcum (R).**

**\***

**“His speech  
could be heard  
by those at the  
foot of the  
Knob via a  
public address  
system.”**

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 Front photo: A.Train, 23.9.2015; <http://flickrriver.com/photos/26424952@N00/21483061009/>  
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