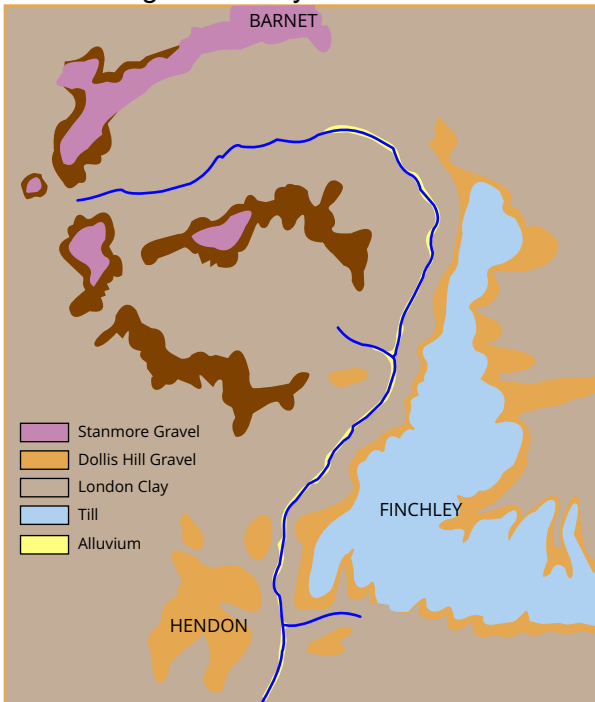


walk notes

The 13 km long Dollis Brook has survived all odds. Had it been further into London it would be culverted. Further out it wasn't worth the expense. Now it is a significant local amenity.

Geology

The path of the Dollis owes much to the Anglian Ice Age, which pushed south about half a million years ago, stopping just south of Finchley. The ice cap blocked northerly flows, forming enormous lakes, and diverting the Thames, originally flowing north-west to the Wash, through London on its current course. Opening the British Geological Survey Map your attention is caught by a light blue triangle, the Finchley triangle, sitting in the midst of the surrounding brown clay.



The light blue represents a unique surface layer of Till, a patchy chalky, sandy clay, pushed down from the north and deposited when the icecap melted. Under this, in a hollow in the base clay of the region, lies a "filling" of Dollis Hill gravel, probably deposited by an earlier major tributary flowing north to join the Thames, then flowing through Watford. The natural easterly flow of the Dollis meets the Finchley triangle and is diverted south, following the line of the Dollis Hill Gravel to Holders Hill, where it cuts through, dividing Hendon from Finchley.

The brook remains on the London clay throughout its length, although it has generated its own thin strip of alluvium.

Nature

The valley forms a green corridor between London's two peripheral walk routes - London Loop and Capital Ring.

In the upper half of the valley, the brook flows past fields and recreation grounds, including a Site of Borough Importance for Nature Conservation, Grade I. Plants such as yellow iris and water-pepper grow along its banks and kingfishers, grey wagtails, and moorhens may be seen along the stream.

It then flows through an area more constrained by housing estates and steeper hillsides, becoming dank in some places. In spring wild garlic is much in evidence.

In 1974 The Finchley Society carried out a survey and reported 85 species of plant and 48 birds.

The Friends of Windsor Open Space on their website at <https://fowos.wordpress.com/about/> have an impressive list of birds and plants observed at different times, including species gained and lost.

Boundaries

The brook (named after the settlement named Dollis?) earlier formed an Saxon boundary between the hundreds of Ossulstone and Gore. Also between Finchley and Hendon, and between Middlesex and Hertfordshire until Barnet Borough was created, bringing these under one authority.

Moat Mount Local Nature Reserve

is part of the Moat Mount and Scratchwood Country Park, owned and managed by the London Borough of Barnet.

In 1923 the parkland adjoining Moat Mount House was acquired by the old Hendon Borough Council to be used as a public open space.

The open space has a wide variety of fine specimen trees. Foxes, muntjac deer and squirrels are among the animal species that can be observed.

In 1997 it was awarded Local Nature Reserve status.

Totteridge Fields

is managed by the London Wildlife Trust as a nature reserve, in partnership with Barnet Council. It has been designated as an area of metropolitan importance for nature conservation.

This traditional lowland pastoral landscape has rich mix of unusual grasses and wildflowers and associated insects, not to mention butterflies. I have spotted foxes playing there. The fields are mown annually as traditional hay meadows to conserve the wildlife.

Mays Lane and Duck Island

Duck Island is the oldest settlement on Mays Lane. Some time after the enclosure of Barnet Common in 1815, a few houses were built here, and by 1861 there was a small tin chapel and school. In 1895 Bells Hill cemetery was opened for High Barnet, and in 1896 a new church, St Stephens was built.

George V playing fields

As a memorial to King George V in 1936 the King George's Fields Foundation was set up to give grants for the establishment of playing fields, on condition they were protected in perpetuity. The 41.28 ha Totteridge fields is protected by charity Fields in Trust and managed by LBB. It stretches south from the Brook to the South Herts Golf Club.

Barnet Playing Fields

Meanwhile, northwards from the brook, the triangular shaped Barnet Playing Fields stretches up to the Ark Academy.

South Herts Golf Club

was founded by members of Muswell Hill Golf Club, who in 1899 faced the prospect of being expelled from their grounds. An added incentive was to allow play on Sundays, not allowed at Muswell Hill as part of the grounds belonged to the Church.

112 acres of farmland were identified at Totteridge, leasehold contracts were signed the same year at a cost of £1,242, plus an annual rental of £331. 10s. 0d. and it was named South Herts Golf Club. The later boundary changes brought it out of Herts to within Greater London.

Surprisingly, Muswell Hill Golf Club survived the threat to its existence and continues today.

Wyatt Farm open space

This open space adjoins Brook Farm open space and presumably has a similar origin.

Brook Farm Open Space

Like much of the area, this farm was used to produce hay for London's horses. The regular harvesting created a special habitat where certain flowers and insects thrived. In summer fields are rich with the different colours of wild flowers and grasses.

Brook Farm was bought by Finchley UDC in 1912 for recreational purposes and the farm buildings on the High Road were demolished in 1914.

Whetstone Stray

Between Laurel Way and Totteridge Lane, Whetstone Stray was once part of the Baxendale Estate, of Pickford's fame. The area of the Stray provided grazing for the

1000 or so horses of the transport business.

The grass was very lush because the dung of the horses was brought back from London to be put on the fields to enrich the grass for grazing.

In 1908 the Government passed legislation that Local Councils must provide land on which the poor could grow their own vegetables and fruit. The Council borrowed money and bought land for allotment use from the Baxendale Trustees.

The steep mound on the north east corner was created from the spoil when the railway was constructed.

The Dollis Valley Green Walk was opened by Finchley Council in the 1930s, thanks largely to Alfred Pike, Finchley's Mayor in 1937.

Riverside Walk North, South

North passes open grass and play facilities; past allotments to the south, is a wilder, more interesting winding wooded terrain.

The Viaduct

You might wonder why a large viaduct across the Dollis Brook would be considered economic for travelling just one stop. The reason, of course, is that the line, opened in 1867, originally went as far as Edgware, as single track, although the viaduct was built to accommodate two.

The viaduct proved a difficult construction. It did not satisfy the Inspectors of the Board of Trade who detected slips in the London Clay on both sides.

Operating difficulties of single track and the arrival of the nearby Midland Railway were to render it unprofitable and it was closed, only retained as far as Mill Hill East because of the importance of the military establishment at a time of war.

The single track across the viaduct was later doubled, but the line was taken up again to be used in armaments, and it remains single track to this day. It has the distinction of being the highest point on the Underground, above surface level.

It is almost 18 m tall and has 13 arches each 9.8 m span. It was designed by John Fowler (of Forth Rail Bridge and Metropolitan Railway fame) and Walter Brydone.

Windsor Open Space

In 1907 part of the Grass Farm estate was bequeathed by Dame Alice Holt as a play area for poor children. In 1922 more land was acquired by the Council for public enjoyment and recreation, and in 1938 Mayor Wolfie Grossman donated land adjacent to Broughton Avenue. See previous page.