



A walk along our own waterway



Easy to spot: Painted walls enhance the stream at one point



Charm of its own: The Mutton Brook in Hampstead Garden Suburb

By Steve Ford

A warm sunny afternoon in April inspired me to get out and finally walk the length of the Mutton Brook, something I've been meaning to do for years. Our humble waterway rises in Cherry Tree Wood and joins another stream, the Dollis Brook, around 2.5 miles (4km) later, before that in turn becomes part of the River Brent.

While trying not to get too carried away, I think the brook has a certain charm of its own, despite being constrained by a concrete bed and wooden banks from source to end. What struck me most was the change in character that the brook undergoes

during its short course.

It begins with gushing energy as it exits and enters drains and pipes at the edge of the wood in N2, then becomes a largely unnoticed culvert running behind flats, before emerging as a tranquil urban

stream running under willow trees in Northway Gardens in NW11 and through meadows near Henlys Corner.

The sunlight dappling on the water, waddling ducks and general lack of people on the path on that day made the walk

feel somewhat more rural than one would expect in the heart of north London. The surprising amount of nature in evidence certainly helped.

During the walk, I saw a respectable 10 species of bird, half a dozen types of butterfly,

including the colourful orange tips that are around in spring-time, as well as some lovely bluebells, garlic and damsons, which greatly helped cheer up the banks.

The presence of humans was, of course, also in evidence. There was a frustrating number of sweet and crisp packets strewn on the path, which turned the walk into a bit of a litter picking exercise. Most disturbing of all, I found the remains of a barbecue and beer picnic, complete with paper plates, left on the path, just a few metres from a bin. Needless to say, I cleared it up.

On the flip side, where the brook emerges from a sewer among the undergrowth and water company equipment behind Belvedere Court, off Lyttelton Road, N2, someone at some time has done an admirable job of adding colourful spots of paint. The effect is to make an ordinary pipe look like the potential home of naiads or some other water fairies. At least that's what I thought. While the Mighty Ganges it is certainly not, the Mutton Brook is our local waterway and something we are lucky to have. Go and seek it out.

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