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Walk in the footprint of the Finchley Glacier



Ice Age frontier: Coldfall Wood

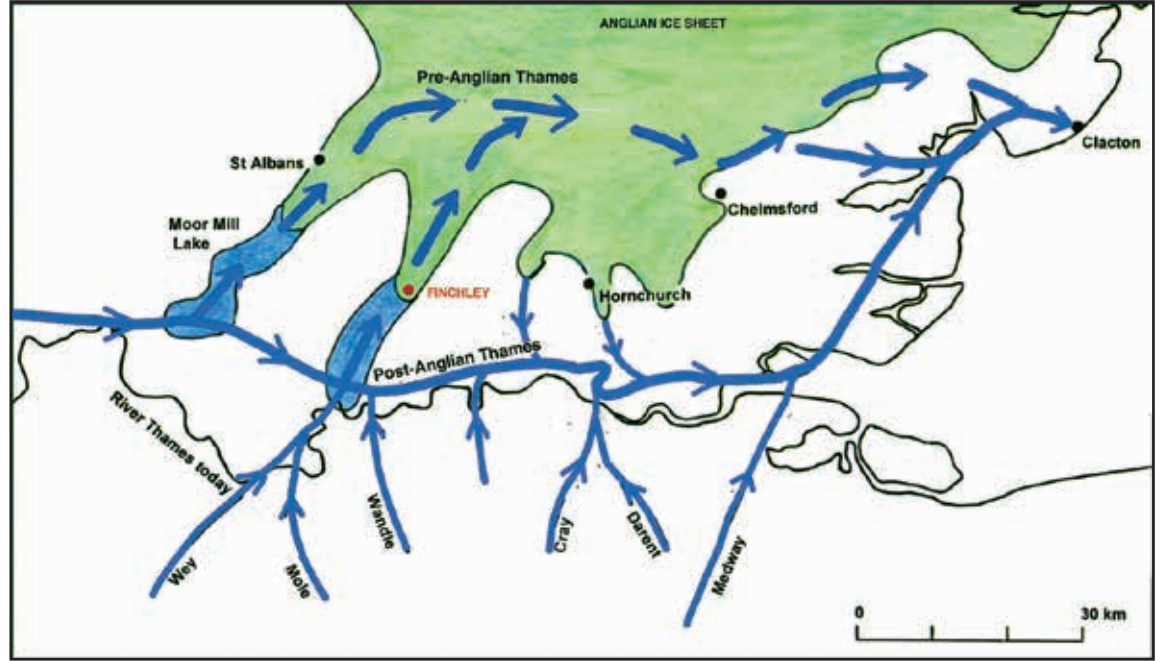
By Diana Clements, of the London Geodiversity Partnership

Did you know that East Finchley was partially covered by a glacier not that long ago (in geological terms)? At the moment we are living in a warm period between ice ages but only 450,000 years ago the most severe of the ice sheets made its way down what we now call 'The Finchley Depression' as a tongue of ice.

We know this because when the ice melted it left behind a mix of materials plucked from the rocks along its route to the south of England. We find this glacial till at its southerly extent in the East Finchley area, most easily seen today

in Islington & St. Pancras Cemetery, on the high ground near the High Road entrance, and East Finchley Cemetery, off East End Road.

The stiff clay is easily distinguished from London Clay by lumps of white chalk



Changing route of the Thames: The former route through the Vale of St Albans became blocked by ice, forcing the Thames to flow along a route more familiar to us today. Tributaries from the Weald to the south crossed the London Basin to join the ancestral route of the Thames before the valley of the new route was created. It was the route of the Mole/Wey/Wandle that deposited the Dollis Hill Gravel in the former 'Finchley Depression' underneath the glacial till. (After Bridgland, 1995 p.36. The Quaternary of the lower reaches of the Thames, Field Guide. Quaternary Research Association).

Woodland stream gets a health check

By Ann Bronkhorst

When the Friends of Coldfall Wood meet our focus often seems to be on water rather than on trees. In recent years Thames Water has detected and resolved many local cases of misplumbing, with visible good effects on

the Coldfall stream. There are still concerns, however, so when a young scientist, Azra Gordy, contacted us about her water sampling project, we were keen to know more.

Azra wanted to assess the water quality of Coldfall stream, looking especially at evidence of conductivity, meaning chemicals and other matter dissolved in the water. Over the winter she waded into the stream many times to place sensors at points along its length and then in again to collect the readings: a chilly and slippery job.

In February we heard the good news: her preliminary findings suggest that conductivity in our stream is at a healthy low level. Conductivity, however, is only one indicator of pollution so the Friends will continue to monitor both the stream and the ever-expanding seasonal pond with its blocked drain. We advise against wild swimming, for now.

that were carried along in the ice from Hertfordshire. In Coldfall Wood, off Creighton Avenue, pieces of slate and granite from as far away as Scotland have been found.

Evidence left behind

Occasionally fossils can be uncovered. These are mostly of Jurassic age (201 to 145 million years ago) and come from even further away. The most well-known fossil finds from the district were pictured by Henry Walker in 1874 and republished by Jack Whitehead in 1993. Jack describes walking along Fortis Green imagining "that my northern

leg, exposed to all that ice, was colder than my southern leg".

River Thames on the move

It is hard to imagine now that the high ground of what is now Finchley was once the low ground of an ancient tributary of the Thames flowing north to join the ancestral Thames running through the Vale of St Albans and out to the North Sea at Clacton.

Once the ice melted, all that changed and the depressed ground under the ice rose, the

melt waters from the glacier eroded the surrounding soft London Clay and the Thames was pushed south into its present course through the centre of what would become London.

So next time you are out walking around the area, wrap up warm and picture the edge of the giant ice sheet that once stretched across East Finchley. Find talks, field trips and information from the Amateur Geological Society North London at amgeosoc.wordpress.com



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