



Prospect Park



Into the Wild



The Prospect Park Nature Trails are a project of the Prospect Park Alliance.

The Waterfall Nature Trail is partially maintained by the Natural Resources Crew and the Woodlands Youth Crew, supported by: The Altman Foundation, Career Internship Network (Tides Center), William Randolph Hearst Foundation, HSBC Bank USA, Mary J. Hutchins Foundation, Independence Community Foundation, JP Morgan Chase Foundation, Henry and Lucy Moses Fund, Inc., The Pinkerton Foundation, Prospect Hill Foundation, The Sulzberger Foundation, TD Charitable Foundation.

Additional support by: United States Department of Justice; Brooklyn Delegation, City Council; New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

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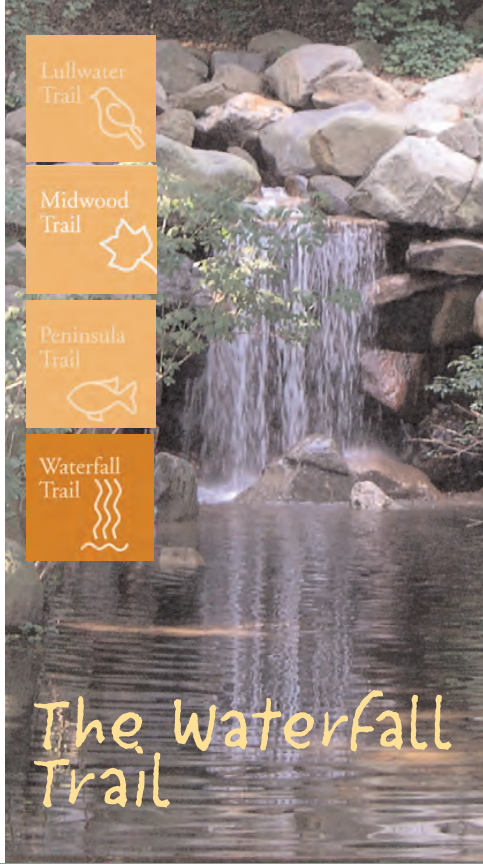


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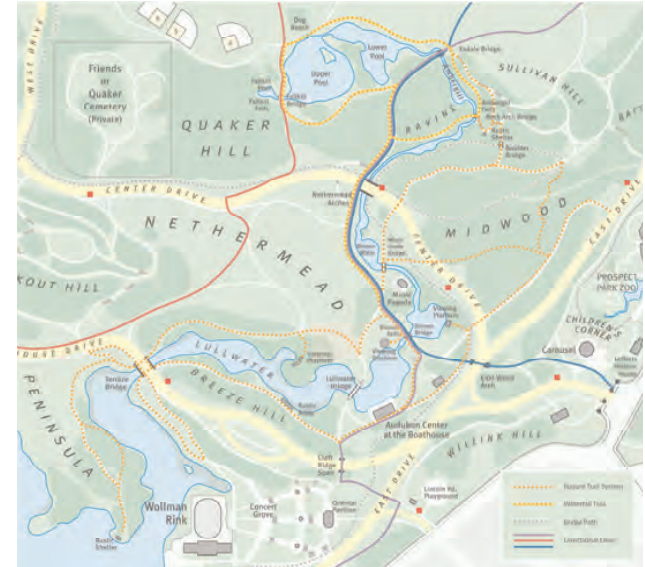
Waterfall Trail
1

Follow the Waterfall Trail over the Ravine and take a short trip into an Adirondack forest. It's not really wilderness, of course, but the park's creators, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, made it feel that way.

"Although we cannot have wild mountain gorges," Olmsted wrote, "we may have rugged ravines shaded with trees and made picturesque with shrubs...which remind us of mountain scenery." The manmade waterway that winds through the Ravine includes ponds, meandering brooks and "a small mountain stream...with numerous small rapids, shoots, and eddies."

After years of neglect, the watercourse was reconstructed. The forest, too, was revived, making it a better place for wildlife.

This guide will take you on an easy, 45-minute walk along a paved path, beginning and ending at the Audubon Center. Numbers in the guide correspond to trail markers. For guided tours and information about other nature trails, visit the Park's Information Center at the Prospect Park Audubon Center.



Wildlife of the Watercourse

Insects and Fish

You can spot insects darting above the streams and pools, and fish swimming below. There are hundreds of different kinds of dragonflies and damselflies, including the Green Darner, Eastern Pond Hawk and Spotted Skimmer. Look for butterflies, too, such as the Clouded Sulphur, Monarch and Mourning Cloak—and the Woolly Bear Moth and Elm Sphinx Moth. Some fish you might see are Golden Shiners, Brown Bullheads, Bluegill Sunfish and Pumpkinseed Sunfish.

Small Mammals

If you hear rustling in the leaves, or see something scamper across a fallen log, it may be an Eastern Chipmunk coming out of its underground home to look for food. Chipmunks are omnivorous—they eat nuts, seeds, berries, insects and even worms. Other small mammals you might spot are White-footed Mice, Cottontail Rabbits, opossums and raccoons.

Birds of the Forest

Hundreds of bird species stop in the Park during migration or live here year round. In the forest, listen for the tapping of the Red-bellied Woodpecker. It's easy to spot one of these noisy birds, with its red cap and zebra-striped back, drilling into a tree trunk. During spring migration, you might see a Black-and-white Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Red-eyed Vireo or White-throated Sparrow.

Birds of the Pools

Winter is a good time to watch ducks and other waterfowl swimming and squawking on the Upper Pool and Lower Pool. Some species you might see are American Black Duck, Wood Duck, Ring-necked Duck, Mallard, Bufflehead and American Coot. From spring through fall, look for the Tree Swallow gliding in the air near the pools. It nests near water in holes in dead trees and fallen logs.

Waterfall
Trail
2

Splish Splash



At the base of the hill, the terrain is more gentle. The watercourse flows quietly from the Binnen Pool, a small but deep body of water. As the stream tumbles over a small stone cascade and under Pagoda Bridge, it invites a relaxed, thoughtful mood.

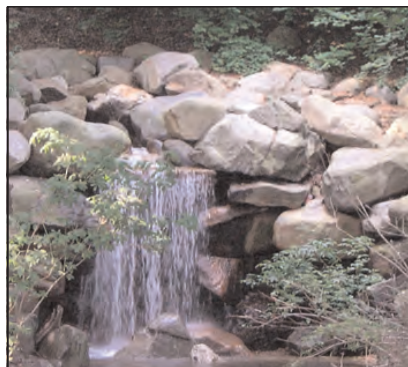
The Binnen Falls is one of many waterfalls along the trail. All of the waterfalls have been carefully restored. The landscape architects followed old photos and documents, and even used many original stones, to make them look like they did when the park was new.



Water spilling onto the rocks mixes with air which creates bubbly water. As a result, the water near riffles and cascades is rich in oxygen and nutrients where algae and mosses thrive. These are good places for water insects to lay their eggs. When the insects hatch, they become food for fish.

Waterfall
Trail
3

Gift from the Glacier



Tens of thousands of years ago, a vast glacier covered much of the northern United States, including Brooklyn as far east as the middle of Prospect Park. You are standing on the terminal moraine, the ridge of rocks and soil left behind when the glacier melted. The giant boulders along the path and in the woods were also carried here by the glacier. They are called glacial erratics.

The Ravine also has the last remnant of the forest that once stretched across much of Brooklyn. As the path rises up into the Ravine, the landscape becomes more rugged and the watercourse flows fast downhill over a rocky bed. Listen to the water splashing over the rocks. It sounds like a mountain stream.

As part of the restoration, workers cleared out and reconstructed the streambed. (First they turned off the tap behind the Fallkill cascade where the watercourse begins.) Then they rebuilt several rock obstacles that create small rapids. One such structure was found buried whole beneath the silt. While recreating the stream, workers tested it—by turning on the water—to make sure it made enough noise.

Waterfall
Trail
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Nature's Music



In this area, the watercourse widens and moves more slowly and quietly. Listen for the sound of rushing water in the distance, it's the Ambergill Falls. Olmsted designed the watercourse so that you'll hear the sound of water long before you see it, which makes the forest seem much larger.

What else can you hear? During the fall and spring migration, some 200 species of songbirds stop over in the park to feed and rest. This is one of the spots they like. They find meals in the oak and tulip trees here, eating the seeds and flowers and the insects the flowers attract. Stop and listen for birdsong.

When Olmsted originally chose plants for the Ravine, he aimed for a lush effect he described as "bosky masses of foliage." He used shrubs and ornamental plants from far and wide. Some of these exotic plants did not thrive in Brooklyn. Others did too well and took over, crowding out native flora that provides food and shelter for birds and other park wildlife.

As part of the forest restoration, gardeners planted native woodland trees, shrubs and wildflowers such as Red Oak, Spicebush, and White Wood Aster.

Waterfall
Trail
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Some Like It Wet



Olmsted and Vaux created the scenic Upper Pool, as well as the Lower Pool to the south, out of kettle ponds originally left by the glacier. Their shining waters next to the dark woods bring to mind mountain ponds on the edge of a wild forest.

It's also a great spot for duck-watching from late October to late March.

Olmsted and Vaux's original pools were very shallow. During the restoration, Park workers deepened them and dug out invasive weeds called Phragmites. The deeper, cooler pools make a much better home for fish.

All around the edges of the ponds, aquatic plants such as Wild Iris, Pickerel Weed and Sweet Flag were planted. These plants produce food and make good hiding places for birds and fish.

