

**LUSS caving trip to YSS and Rowten Pot, 19-21<sup>st</sup> January – Remy Hoek Spaans**



This weekend trip was organized by the now almost official Lancaster University Spleleological Society (LUSS), which a number of motivated people are currently trying to revive. York University was kindly hosting us for a training weekend at the YSS and after a day trying to master Single Rope Technique (SRT) on Saturday, on Sunday it was finally time to put our new-found skills to the test.

When we opened the curtains in the morning, we discovered that it was snowing! Although this made for a pretty picture, this meant the trip originally planned out by the Yorkies had to be abandoned because of safety issues. The entrance of the cave at Bull Pot farm is at the top of a hill and our car barely made it up a normal hill let alone an icy slope. Luckily our York uni guides quickly came up with a creative solution and offered to take us to two different caves instead. This meant our group split up, with Ben, Julliane and I going to Rowten Pot to take the Eye Hole Route, and the rest to Valley entrance under the guidance of Josh.

As a Dutch girl, coming from a country that is pretty much flat and not having done any SRT before this weekend, going down Rowten Pot was certainly an exciting yet slightly fear-inducing prospect. However, I feel like there is only one way to really re-enforce a training day and that is by going out and practice outdoors! So we packed up, got ourselves all geared-up in the ever charming caving oversuits and helmets and got to the cave via a hike up a snowy hill.

This certainly warmed us up and gave us some lovely views of the Kingsdale hills. After making sure we tested our ascenders and felt confident, it was time to step over the edge... into a 30m drop. Right away I could hear the water of the underground West Kingsdale river and it was a magnificent feeling, descending into the darkness with the water falling in the background. After the first drop, we made our way to the next one, which was to the entrance of a traverse below a ledge. Making it to the traverse below, you can see the water in the depths below you and can't help but have respect for the force with which it carved out its path throughout the cave. Because of timing and the amount of rope we had, this is where we ended our exploration. The only way to get back up from under the ledge, was to do a little rope swing. I swear, no one can help but have a cheesy smile on his/her face when on a swing!

All this time Jean-Luc and Alistair made sure we remembered all the safety steps, guided us through the cave and made sure we would not do anything stupid. Being a bit stubborn, of course I did not let them get in the way of my own stupidity. Ben went up first and after he had been dangling at the top of the rope for a while, I decided it would be a good idea to ask him if he was ok. He was fine, except that his chest jammer got stuck and he could not get the tension of the rope to undo it... It took a good amount of time and Alistair explained me what had most likely happened and that I should not do that. After Ben eventually got out of the cave... obviously I went up to do the exact same thing... twice. Yes, I managed to get stuck, get myself loose, only to attach myself to the wrong rope and get stuck again. Since I am writing this now, I can confirm I made it out, just a bit more tired and embarrassed than strictly necessary. Let's just say it was a good lesson for my next caving trip.

- Special thanks to York University (Josh, Alistair, Jean-Luc, Nat) for training and guiding us this weekend, we had a blast!

Remy