

# Geography Report - February

Jane Harrison



In February we welcomed our youngest speaker to date. Jonah Blake is a third year geography undergraduate at Durham University. Jonah's contentious title was "What is the point of a modern geography degree?" To answer this, Jonah outlined his course and explained how the knowledge and skills acquired would prepare him and other students for the future.

Geography has certainly changed in recent decades. Cultural and political identity, climate and sustainability, digitisation, and decoloniality now appear on university level courses. Michel Foucault, David Harvey, Edward Said and Doreen Massey are some of the key thinkers.

At Durham the BA and BSc geography undergraduates follow a common foundation course in the first year. Most modules are compulsory. In the second and third year the number of optional modules increases. Jonah has specialised in social-economic geography and has chosen courses with titles such as "Geographies of Crisis" and "Geographies of Money and Finance". There has been an emphasis on theory and philosophical concepts. An approach that looks at people and the world through different "lenses" has been adopted. It is intellectually demanding but Jonah is clearly thriving on it!



Fieldwork still plays an important role in research. In years one and two there are visits to Newcastle and Bristol. Jonah had the opportunity to go to Norway, in his third year, where he

worked on combined projects with BSc students. This was a memorable experience even if they all got very wet on a glacier!

In the third year students also undertake a dissertation. Jonah is researching venture philanthropy and the Wall Street development paradigm. (I'll make no attempt to explain that!)

Jonah has 10 hours contact time each week. He values the expertise of the academic staff who are at the forefront of geographical research. It's not all work however, like most students Jonah enjoys the social side of collegiate life and extra-curricular activities. He is a talented footballer.

When they finish their degrees, geographers are well-rounded, critical thinkers whose skills transfer across disciplines. They are very employable and go on to a wide range of careers. In 2021-2022 73% of BA geography graduates were in full-time employment or study. After graduating Jonah will be working as a sustainability consultant.

Jonah certainly conveyed that he thought geography was still relevant in the 21st century and his love and enthusiasm for the subject shone through.

Afterwards Gerald organised a fiendishly difficult geography quiz. Deciding which were Britain's deepest lakes and identifying countries from their outlines proved particularly tricky!

Next meeting: Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> April. 2pm in The Witham. Tim Meacham "The railways of Teesdale"