

Editorial

Rudolf Trümpy (1921–2009)



Fig. 1. Professor Trümpy in a typical pose – Novate quarry, ETH field trip, April 1975. Talking about the structure of the Alps, he once said, “One poor fossil is worth two good hypotheses”. Needless to say, he did not find even a poor fossil in the Novate granite. (Photo: A.G. Milnes).

Rudolf Trümpy passed away on January 31, 2009. He was a towering figure on the Swiss geological stage, not only as long time Professor of Geology at the ETH Zürich and the University of Zürich, but also as an exceptional personality. As a geologist he was engaged and thoughtful, with wide-ranging interests and a capability for clear argumentation in several languages, and with a gift for enthusing students and colleagues for what

he once called “the delightful mysteries of our science”. I had the privilege of being a colleague of Rudi’s, albeit a very junior one, during the 1970s, throughout one of the most exciting periods in the history of geology – the plate tectonic revolution. We young Alpine geologists were caught up in the euphoria of the new way of thinking and started immediately to turn the Alps upside-down and inside-out, reinterpreting everything according to the new theory. Rudi proved to be the true scientist, using his enormous experience of Alpine geology to carefully test all aspects of the hypothesis (for that is what it was at the time!), to continue to collect relevant geological data (whether it “fit” the hypothesis or not!), and to place the “revolution” in its historical perspective (refusing to jump onto a fashionable bandwagon) – and to slowly come to accept the main outlines of the hypothesis as a usable framework for future research. This led to occasional outbreaks of anger at our precociousness, our inexperienced toppling of established dogmas, and we were annoyed in return at his detailed knowledge of all corners of the Alps and of every word which had been written about them. Controversy is however the stuff of science; our positions converged with time and no grudges were held. Later in life, and in typical manner, Rudi described the development of his ideas during these years in considerable detail in an article which I can recommend to anyone interested in the history and philosophy of science (“Why plate tectonics was not invented in the Alps”, *International Journal of Earth Sciences*, 2001).

From his original base in stratigraphy, paleogeography and Alpine tectonics, his interests branched out into wider areas, always passionately focussed on what he called “good science”, and he became internationally recognized, being awarded prestigious prizes and academic honours, and eventually becoming President of the International Union of Geological Sciences. After his retirement in 1986 he concentrated more and more on the history of Alpine geology, and in his last note to me, attached to an article on Albert Heim published in 2008, he wrote, “Having almost abandoned science, I indulge in some paleo-psychology” (The title of the article in English: “Insight and delusion in Alpine tectonics”!). Over the years, he and his students published numerous scientific papers in the *Eclogae Geologicae Helveticae*, the forerunner of the *Swiss Journal of*

Geosciences, and behind the scenes he contributed to the continued high scientific standard of the journal by his informal and formal review work, and whole-hearted support during his time as President of the Swiss Geological Society. It is not possible in this brief Editorial to do justice to the influence Rudolf Trümpy has had on Swiss geoscience, Alpine tectonics and international relations, nor his personal influence on students, colleagues and friends in the private sphere. These few words are an expression of gratitude by one of the latter for having had the privilege of

knowing a great geoscientist and a kind and generous man. In our hearts and minds, he will live on. In a coming issue of this journal, we will publish a more detailed obituary and scientific appraisal. Meanwhile, our sincere condolences go to Barbara, Daniel and the closest family.

A.G. Milnes
Co-Editor, Geology Section
Swiss Journal of Geosciences