

## OBITUARY

### PHILIPPE ROUILLER

Philippe Rouiller, one of Europe's top cavers, died on May 27, 1990 while traversing a narrow canyon in the Swiss Alps. His family, longtime girlfriend Ursi Sommer, and many friends will greatly miss him and his boundless enthusiasm for life.

Philippe grew up in Basel, Switzerland where he started caving in his early teens. His legendary caving prowess was quickly revealed. He soon became very active in the many caving regions in Switzerland. The Jura Mountains became his weekend backyard training ground for both caving and climbing.

Philippe was a solid 5.10 climber. He participated in many, long push trips in the famous and never-ending Holloch System. The K2, named after its Himalayan equivalent, and the long, complex SiebenHengste-Hogant System were, however, targets for most of his caving activity. His fearless free and SCUBA diving talents became essential in many breakthroughs, including linking the Faustloch with

the main system through a long, muddy sump, thus making the SiebenHengste the first cave both over 1000 meters deep and over a hundred kilometers long.

He was also the key diver to penetrate the -565 sump in Barenshacht, a long, deep and cold cave tantalizingly close to the SiebenHengste. The tight breakdown sump, in 4-degree Celsius water had already claimed one experienced diver. The breakthrough, made with two other divers, led to over six kilometers of large passage which still goes.

Philippe, apart from being probably the most active caver in Switzerland, was a prolific and excellent cartographer. He was the Swiss correspondent for the International Commission on Long and Deep Caves

and also served as the editor for STALAGTITE, Switzerland's premier caving publication.

Philippe was known to many U.S. cavers from the joint expeditions they shared. These included the two-month-long, 1982 Papua New Guinea Expedition. He and Ursi led the exploration of Leiwaro Kundu, the longest and most dangerous push trips. He was also



Urs Widmer and Philippe Rouiller (right) in Lechuguilla Cave, 1988.

a driving force on the 1987 and 1989 Cerro Rabón, México Expeditions, tirelessly pushing the deep Kijahe Xontjoa and the many other caves in the region. He also participated on the August 1988 Lechuguilla Expedition. A stretch of the Western Borehole has been named Rouillers Way, in his honor.

For those who had the privilege to cave with Philippe, they would certainly agree he was an extraordinary individual. He always glowed with unlimited enthusiasm and energy. His confidence flowed into those who adventured with him, making them feel that they could accomplish anything. His motto was "This is no problem!". Philippe was known for moving through a cave, as a 5.12 climber moves over rock, with the grace of a

perfected ability. Where other cavers would get muddy all over, Philippe was content to soil only the bottom of his boots. Even with his talents and speed, he gave his encouragement and concern to anyone who needed help, no matter what level of ability, whether it was going up a mountain or on a long hard, cave trip.

Philippe liked to live his adventures to their fullest; accepting all the risks as if they were an important ingredient for a thorough adventure. His remarkable abilities had allowed him to escape a long list of close calls. The canyon trip was a sporting trip consisting of a long series of waterfalls in a vertically-walled canyon. Philippe, who was leading, disappeared from the end of a rope in one of these falls for reasons that are unknown. His two close friends, who were with him, suspected a fatal accident when they failed to find him at the bottom of the waterfall

or waiting before the top of the next unrigged falls. They awaited a rescue and the following day Philippe's body was found.

A memorial service was held on June 5, 1990 in Basel. Philippe worked for many years as a pharmacist in his father's apothecary. The many people who had frequented the apothecary will also miss Philippe's warmth and deep concern.

For myself, I will sorely miss his radiant personality and caving/climbing comradery. His inspiringly strong spirit will always be with me and I am grateful for the time we shared.

*Karlin Meyers*