



RUDOLF TRÜMPY (1921–2009)

Rudolf Trümpy, Professor emeritus of Geology at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology and the University of Zürich and grand old man of Alpine geology, passed away in his home-town Küsnacht, Switzerland on the 30th of January 2009. Rudolf Trümpy was known as careful and great observer, thoughtfully weighing pros and cons of hypotheses, and as an enthusing teacher and a multilingual, humorous and entertaining speaker. He was familiar with all the Alpine geology over the whole belt and a benevolent patron of young, ambitious geologists and their projects.

Rudolf Trümpy was born at Glarus in Graubünden on August 16th in 1921 into a family of geologists all serving in the oil industry. He studied geology at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zürich where he gained a master's degree and continued with a doctoral thesis on the Lower Jurassic sediments of the Helvetic nappes around Glarus in eastern Switzerland. With his thesis, he laid the foundation for his future work: his focus on the Alpine Mesozoic cover succession, thorough observations in the field, and careful stratigraphy and palaeogeographic synthesis. In his doctoral thesis (1947, published 1949), he discovered that the Alpine geosynclines with Jurassic sediments are dominated by extensional faulting. Later, he recalled that he was lucky having chosen the right topic for his thesis.

Trümpy started his academic career at the University of Lausanne and he later claimed that 'At the tender age of 29, to run the small institute single-handed' was essential for his further career. His research during this period at Lausanne was devoted to sedimentary nappes of western and central Switzerland. He could show that the Valais zone formed an independent deep trough and that the 'Nappe des Préalpes Médiannes' was derived from the middle Penninic basement nappes in the Valais region and not from the Austroalpine realm as believed by most Swiss geologists at that time.

In 1953, he became the successor of his former supervisor Alphonse Jeannet and returned to the ETH, and served there as a professor until his retirement 1986. As a professor at the ETH he attracted many master and PhD students from Switzerland and abroad, and virtually ca. 65 PhD students finished their doctoral thesis under his supervision.

His initial research at the ETH resulted in his masterly 1960 synthesis of the 'Paleotectonic Evolution of the Central and Western Alps' (Trümpy 1960, Bull. Geol. Soc. Am. 71, 843–908) a publication that established his international reputation and got a highly cited benchmark paper often used in tectonics textbooks. The style of his palaeogeographic reconstructions was often copied by other researchers working in Alpine mountain belts and can be found in many papers. He continued to work on Alpine palaeogeography and increasingly applied principles of plate tectonics (e.g., Trümpy, 1975, Penninic-Austroalpine boundary in the Swiss Alps: a presumed former continental margin and its problems. Am. J. Sci. A275, 209–238). A famous saying of Rudolf Trümpy from that period is 'that a bad fossil is more valuable than a good working hypothesis' (Trümpy 1971, Stratigraphy in mountain belts. Quart. J. Geol. Soc. London, 126, 293–318). Rudolf Trümpy was also highly interested in the geology of the Eastern Alps and cooperated with researchers with a similar stratigraphic-palaeogeographic approach such as Rudolf Oberhauser. Moreover, he was also a benevolent reviewer of Austrian research proposals and manuscripts as I well remember.

Rudolf Trümpy also worked outside of the Alps, and an early paper appeared on the Montagne Noire in 1952, written together with de Sitter and Gèze. In the early Seventies he started to work with his students in the Betic Cordillera and Rif



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Mountains across the Arc of Gibraltar. As he wrote later, his main motivation for choosing this area was the apparent absence of a major plate boundary. Rudolf Trümpy was aware of the fact that Alpine geologists missed the invention of plate tectonics ("Why plate tectonics was not invented in the Alps", International Journal of Earth Sciences, 2001).

Rudolf Trümpy served in many positions to the international geological community, e.g., as Treasurer and later as President of the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS).

He got many prestigious honors: In 1978, he was elected a Foreign Associate of the United States National Academy of Sciences and he was also a member of the French Academy of Sciences. In 1985, Rudolf Trümpy was honored by the Austrian Geological Society with the Eduard-Suess-Medal and Honorary Membership and the Penrose Medal of the Geological Society of America. He also received the Gustav Steinmann Medal of the Geologische Vereinigung (1998) and the Wollaston Medal of the Geological Society of London (2002).

Rudolf Trümpy's work on Alpine palaeogeography continues to have a great impact on ongoing research and on the evaluation of new syntheses.