

Tribute to Bernard Urbain

Bernard Urbain was born to Jemappes on November 25th, 1952 and died to Namur July 31st, 2011 (Belgium) at the age of 58.

I believe that fundamentally Bernard would not have liked this title: «tribute! » He would say to us: "I have not need of all this ". But it is like that that things say themselves and it is its time, now.

From the age of 15 years Bernard took himself of passion for the caving and his activities led him in caves and abysses of Belgium. With his club, the caving club of Belgium, where he adheres in 1969, he is going out borders and participated in multiple expeditions in France at Pierre St Martin, Lonné Peyret, the Reseau Trombe, gouffre Berger etc. the list is long. We also find him in Italy in Marguareis on the system of Piaggia Bella.

In 1971 he makes his Non-military national service to the Disaster and emergency services of Belgium. It is in this opportunity that he gets acquainted of the cave rescue organization there. He becomes, in 1973 already, a team member of the cave rescue team. The same year he meets speleologist rescuer in the team of Brussels, managed by Dimitri de Martinoff and André Slagmolen... He joins then the namuroise section of cave rescue.

He puts a lot then into the administrative caving, this thankless activity in the service of the whole community. If he assures the secretarial department of his caving Club, we find him administrator to the Committee of Preservation of Caves (from 1979 till 1983), and administrator to the Belgian Committee of Caving (from 1978 till 1984)

At the beginning of the 80s, three Belgian federations (FSB, CBS and FNSA) negotiate for a long time their fusion and the creation of the Union Belgian of Speleology (UBS) which becomes a reality at the end of 1984. As negotiator was appointed by the smallest of three federations, Gérald Fanuel quickly meets involved whereas Bernard, sought from several sides, will rise in this train only in 1989 ... It will be directly in the first car and for a few years! He will be Director of the UBS from 1989 till 2004, General Secretary from 1989 till 1995 and from 2003 till 2004, Vice-president in 1996, and President in 1998 ...

When in 2004, he leaves the Secretariat and the Board of directors of the UBS, it is not to go away from the federal management, but to dive there totally in passing of volunteer's status in that from the employee. He became Administrative Director with the precarious mission to install the UBS to Namur.

It is the disease which takes him today which forced him neglected in 2008 ...

At the same time, he will be also Secretary of the European Speleologist Federation from 1990 till 1992.

But from 1984, he is Technical adviser in cave rescue, at first CTA (assistant), then (National) CTN from 1996. In this time, he appreciated the trainings which were made between friends, besides the official exercises.

He is then a secretary of the Belgium Cave Rescue before becoming the director. With Gérald Fanuel they will form an effective binomial in the head of the cave rescue.

The Cave Rescue, it was a little his baby. He put it all his guts, as much in the organization as in the operations. He put a lot there totally, with all his strength. The proof: during an accident to Justin, he does not hesitate to enter pair of shorts and light sandals in the cave under the glance a little stunned by fire brigades.

He fought so that the value of the Belgian cave rescue is known inside the Belgian borders and outside. His enthusiasm helped him a lot.

However, in to say about his co-workers, he was not still evident to work with him. But he knew also how to question himself.

On the occasion of 7^e cave rescue congress international of Cividale in Italy in 1987, Bernard joined the executive committee of the cave rescue commission of the Union International of Speleology.

During this congress of Cividale, he was marked by the cave rescue exercise which took place in abyss with the cooperation of all the cavers. He had very precise images of the passages of the stretcher in the pits and the commitment of the Italian cavers to go at the end of the operation.

In 1992 he organizes the European congress of Hélocine in Belgium.

In 2002 he organizes the 50 years of the speleologist Belgium help with the reception of 14 delegations foreign to Sart Tilman near Liège in Belgium.

For him the cave rescue is serious but it does not take itself seriously. Thus the Belgian cave rescue shirt he put in the back, a drawing showing a stretcher held by two cavers jokers who turn back and go their separate ways. It's wearing that shirt we have carried in his last litter August 4, 2011 in the cemetery of Naninne.

His name is forever inscribed on the Honour Roll of a club and a federation, as Honorary Secretary General of the Society of Speleology Namur and Honorary Member of the Belgian Union of Speleology.

Beyond these titles, he will remain for those who approached him a caver unusual, active and devoted to the cause which is common us, internationally known and appreciated.

Contributors to the cause caving we had become friends. We knew that the fight against the disease was uneven and all our attention and our efforts were going to block for him as long as possible. Live because you expect something from us. Live to concentrate on essential things beyond all trivia parasites of our world.

From projects to achievements we have a serious long way with Bernard.

The first meeting that I remember took place in the Jura (France) at the rescue at Bief Goudard in summer 1998. Bernard, then Technical Advisor National Cave Rescue Belgian, moved with some other cavers in Belgium during research conducted in the siphon to find

Freddy Sonck. From that time we will meet us each year in the national gatherings of the French Federation of Speleology. My responsibilities in the field of cave rescue would work us more diligent.

Bernard had a thorough knowledge of people and international structures and my first steps in this area have been guided by his advice.

From 2006 we became inseparables and in regular contacts. If the backup has occupied both in international seminars, conferences of the commission help of the International Union of Speleology, gatherings of the UIS (Greece, Texas, Puerto Rico ...), our round-trips between the Belgium and Savoy became common.

So I hope to contribute in the field of knowledge of bats with Belgian cavers and Bernard organizes outings in the remarkable cavities of Belgium with the scientific referents of the country.

When the disease impedes physical performance, Bernard launched into the picture with underground shots of a rare definition. His contribution in this area is increasing and brings in his view of the activities we conduct. Finally, we have used and abused his number phone SOS computer to find the right solutions of our computers malfunction or our ignorance in this area.

In the end, we support each other from project to project to nibble a few moments of life. Bernard found archives at home of Andre Slagmolen which had preceded us in the field of international cave rescue. Thus he was able to make power point in assembling a history of the International Commission of Speleology. I was hoping he presents himself at the 12th Conference of the Commission cave rescue of the UIS in Bulgaria this month of May 2011, but he did not feel the strength to make the trip. It is with some emotion that I presented the history of the commission for him.

For several months, methodically, he kept his business distributing to one or the other, folders or boxes to continue the work caving. He knew he was going so he wanted to take this opportunity to know near death to organize it. He considered he had the chance to prepare for his death. On our side, friends, family, cavers, we did everything to delay the deadline. I got the archive of cave rescue international, part of his collection of stickers cave (probably the most extensive in the world) on the theme of rescue. I still have in front of the cards he had printed for this purpose to extend its network. He wrote "enter into the legend ..."

More than into legend, Bernard was an actor of caving and we were aware that he was inside in the heart of the history of caving.

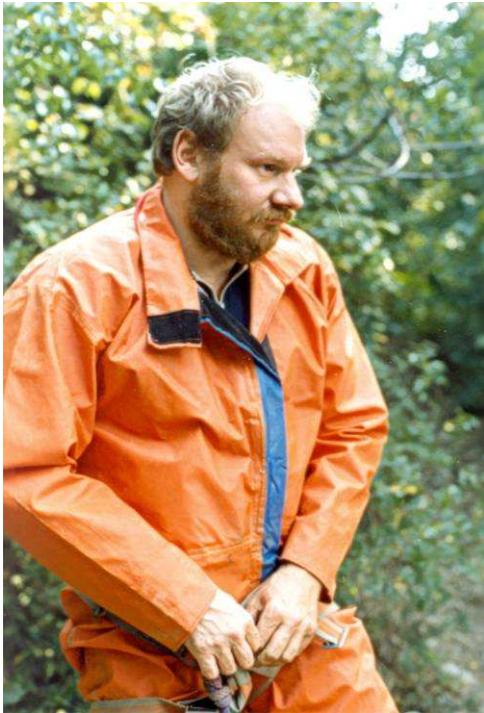
Beyond the time lived on all continents, on and inside the karst, taking turns sharing experiences and knowledge is a journey and reflections on the meaning of life, the meaning of death that we have done together. Bernard had prepared for his departure ceremony, it was of exceptional intensity and those unable to attend will not forget it.

As for this damned disease has been able to say several times Goodbye, I keep still, as the landscapes and places where I am, the opportunity to tell us goodbye.

Christian Dodelin - September 22, 2011.

Thank you to his friends Belgian cavers and their contribution: Richard Grebeude, Benoit Lebeau, Gérald Fanuel, Jean Marc Mattlet.

Some pictures:



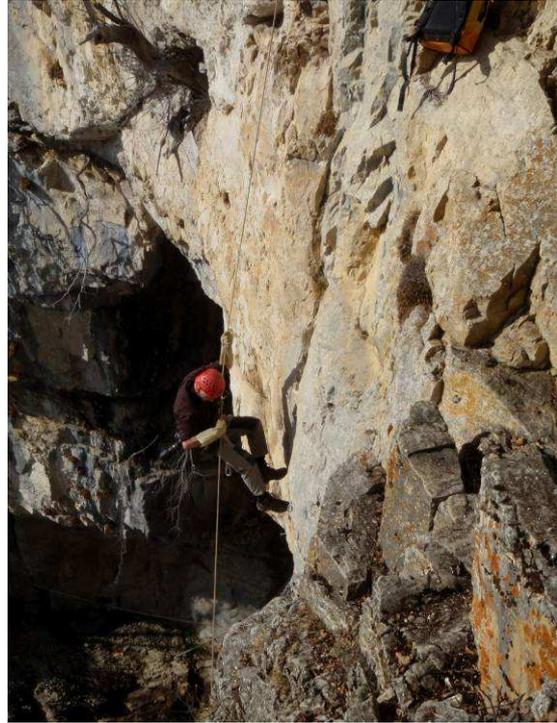
Bernard Urbain in 1989



Bernard on the left and Christian Dodelin February 25, 2011 at the Doria cave in Savoie (France)



Bernard has a passion for photography, his camera never left here in the United States (Brice canyon) in summer 2009



Last go down to the cave of the Doria in Savoy February 25, 2011 (Bernard in brown and C. Dodelin in green)



June 17, 2011 in Belgium Bernard Urbain and C. Dodelin.

February 21, 2011, in front of the Mt Blanc, Anne Françoise Laurent wife of Bernard Urbain, Anne gallez, et Gérald Fanuel, Christian Dodelin.