

A DEDICATION TO GEORGE HUPPERT

- Arthur Clarke

Following my recent posting to the ACKMA List Server – reporting the untimely death of ACKMA member: George Huppert – the ACKMA editor requested this as an article. Re-written as a dedication to George Huppert, the posting has been expanded to include a compilation of information: reports about his tragic accident (based on correspondence received from Louise Hose and Calvin Alexander in USA), further reference to notes in my travel journal, plus an obituary notice written by George's wife: Betty Wheeler, with minor editing by Louise Hose. (I have omitted the two original list server postings by Rob Stitt and Louise Hose – as posted to the ACKMA List Server on 30/11/2001.)

While en route to the recent National Cave and Karst Management Symposium (NCKMS) at Tucson (Arizona, USA), George Huppert flew into Phoenix (Arizona) on Saturday 13 October 2001 - taking advantage of the cheaper airline tickets on offer (following the downturn in demand for US air travel after the 11 September events in New York and Washington). He rented a car and was spending Sunday driving through the “spectacular country” of central Arizona, prior to driving down to Tucson where the NCKMS commenced on Tuesday 16 October 2001. Betty Wheeler has said that George had a contact in Globe (east of Phoenix) and had mentioned trying to arrange a mine visit. She did not know if he had succeeded in visiting the mine or whether George was just sightseeing. The accident occurred on Highway 188 - which goes right by Roosevelt Lake, located east-northeast of Phoenix, in central Arizona.

His car reportedly crossed the centre median of a two-lane road and ran head on into an oncoming car. It is believed that the accident occurred at about 6pm local time - not at an unusually late time. There are two obvious possibilities: George may have gone to sleep at the wheel or he may have suffered some sort of health problem. George had had open-heart surgery to replace a valve and had an ongoing history of heart problems. It is understood that the two passengers in the oncoming car, while injured, survived the accident. (As at time of this compilation – 08/11/2001 - Betty apparently has not received an official account of the accident, nor a final death certificate.) If George had been touring all day (it is known that he visited at least one National Monument earlier on Sunday), it seems more possible that he just went to sleep at the wheel. (It has been stated that late afternoon is not a high point of the metabolism of men in their late 50's, when your blood sugar is at its lowest and you need a king hit of food or maybe just a sticky bun. It's the late afternoon time when we like to take naps!)

Two years ago, on Sunday 17 October 1999, I was privileged to be George's travelling companion during the latter part of his long drive south from La Crosse (Wisconsin) – via Louisville (Kentucky) - then onto Chattanooga (Tennessee) where we both attended the

1999 NCKMS. I had been staying with Bill and Judy Austin at their *Kentucky Down Under* tourist complex near Horse Cave, while caving in the nearby *Mammoth Cave* system and suffering numerous panic attacks and adrenalin rushes while learning to drive on the wrong (right) side of the road in an old diesel powered BMW. I first met George on the evening of Saturday 16th when Judy Austin and I attended a special dinner party to celebrate the re-opening of the recently revamped *Diamond Caverns* (near Cave City) and their new carbide lantern museum. George had just come from Louisville (Kentucky), where he attended the Light and Lamp Collectors' meeting. One of my first conversations with George centred on the enigmatic/ geomorphic origin of the so-called “stalactiflats” in *Diamond Caverns* – speleothems forming on a platelet that originally sat on still water or a sediment surface. Sometime later, we discussed our similar cave lighting experiences, using the older style, often modified hand-held carbide lanterns.

The following day, George collected me outside the American Cave Conservation Association (ACCA) Museum in the town of Horse Cave, after I had just completed a quick second caving trip into *Hidden River Cave* at the ACCA museum site. En route to the NCKM symposium in Chattanooga, we had several conversations about various aspects of US culture, karst and language differences. Taking me under his wing, George explained the US system of Interstate Roads or highways, where the East-West roads have even numbers and the North-South roads have odd numbers with exit roads being named/ numbered according to mileage to/ from the southern or western state border. We stopped at several diners where I experienced my first taste of carbonated soft drinks in USA made with a heavily chlorinated water base and George related the problem of accessing drinking water from polluted karst aquifers. Following that experience, I decided to only drink beer – preferably Australian beer – and was surprised to learn that beer was sold at service stations where George stopped to fill his car with petrol. Referred to as gasoline in the US, the price per gallon (4.5 litres) of petrol was cheap: just a little more than the price we paid for a litre of petrol in Australia.

George and I conversed about the environmental problems of karst management and cultural constraints, particularly in the US where householders, landowners and manufacturers are generally quite ignorant about karstic phenomena or karst impacts and continue to unwittingly pollute karst aquifers. George was interested in the karst management issues of Tasmania, including my recent Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) report on management prescriptions for cave fauna in forested karst areas and the *Atlas of Tasmanian Karst* produced by Kevin Kiernan. As we approached Chattanooga along Highway 24 from Nashville late on Sunday afternoon/ early evening, passing lots of large supermarket-size fireworks emporiums, I had

my first experience of the frustration that US motorists seem to constantly suffer: we were in a traffic jam from a point 12 miles west of the city and it took another two-and-a-quarter hours to reach Chattanooga.

The in-depth conversations with George Huppert continued at length for the next six days during the course of the last (1999) NCKMS at Chattanooga, where we shared a room together at the Clarion Hotel. George also told me about the US system of “national monuments” where many significant caves sites – some of them with associated archaeological/anthropological sites - have been federally reserved, in a sense as “national treasures”. Our room sharing experience was interesting in another way, because it was during this time that George had his daily and sometimes twice daily phone calls with Betty, so I ended up getting to know her too, without actually meeting her and I was occasionally in our hotel room to receive her calls when George wasn't there! So now it is probably most appropriate to conclude this dedication to George Huppert with the following obituary written by Betty Wheeler.

Obituary for George N. Huppert (by Betty Wheeler, edited by Louise Hose)

Dr. George N. Huppert, of La Crosse Wisconsin, died October 14, 2001 in a head-on car crash in the Roosevelt Lakes area near Globe, Arizona. He was on his way to a professional meeting, the National Cave and Karst Management Symposium in Tucson. George was 56 years of age.

George was married to Betty J. Wheeler, formerly of Franktown, Colorado in 1979. He had previously had two sons, Kendon G. Huppert (deceased) and Steven C. Huppert (now of Brooklyn, New York) with Lorraine Lester (now of Albuquerque, New Mexico). George is survived by Betty; by her Betty's parents: Eugene and Elsie Wheeler (of Franktown, Colorado); and by Betty's two sisters and brothers-in-law: Pat and Bill Fuerstenberger (of Windsor, Colorado) and Kathy and Ken Ashwood of Gunnison, Colorado. He is also survived by 3 nephews, 2 nieces and Susanna Lester (sister of Kendon and Steve) of Albuquerque, New Mexico. He was preceded in death by his parents: Sergeant Major Frederick W. Huppert II (of the U. S. Marine Corps), and Sheilah N. Huppert; and by his only brother: Captain Frederick W. Huppert III (of the U.S. Air Force).

The funeral was held at the St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Castle Rock, Colorado on Saturday, October 20, 2001. The Pike's Peak Grange of Franktown, Colorado prepared a luncheon after the service. Interment is at the Franktown Cemetery. There will be a memorial service in George's honor on Saturday, October 27, 2001 at 11 a.m. at the Cleary Center on the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse campus, where George taught geography and earth science for over 22 years.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that contributions in George's name be sent to:

- 1) The American Cave Conservation Association, P.O. Box 409, Horse Cave, Kentucky, 42749; or

- 2) “The George Huppert Memorial Scholarship Fund,” in care of the University of Wisconsin—La Crosse Foundation; contact Dr. Dean Wilder, Department of Geography and Earth Science, University of Wisconsin—La Crosse, La Crosse, WI, 54601, (608) 785-8333; or
- 3) Second Chance Animal Rescue; contact Nancy Minion, P.O. Box 10533, White Bear Lake, Minnesota, 55110, (612) 625-5662; or your local animal rescue.

George Huppert's Professional Life

George was well known by his friends and colleagues as having wide-ranging interests in the sciences, particularly geography and geology. He was a lifelong learner, as evidenced by the six university degrees he completed, including Bachelor's degrees in both, Geography (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) and Geology (Winona State University at Winona, Minnesota); Master's degrees in Geography and Education (both at the University of Idaho at Moscow, Idaho); a Master's degree in Statistics and a Doctor of Arts degree (both at the University of Northern Colorado at Greeley, Colorado). He read two or more newspapers daily, and several hundred books, professional journals, and magazines per year. George was devoted to the study of the earth and nature, with an insatiable thirst for knowledge. Another trait was his outgoing and friendly demeanor; George was truly interested in people, and he demonstrated this in his daily interactions with whomever he met. He also loved animals and the beauty of nature; and he promoted the protection of animals and their habitats, as well as all natural resources.

George was born in Brooklyn, New York and traveled many parts of the world from a very young age, as his father was in the U. S. Marine Corps and was stationed many places during George's formative years, including Marine bases in Yokosuka, Japan; Rota, Spain; and many Marine bases around the U.S. While his father was stationed in Spain, George and his brother Frederick spent an entire summer traveling around the Mediterranean Sea, seeing much of Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. He was an Eagle Scout in the Boy Scouts, and went on his first trip to a cave (“*Cueva de la Pileta*” which means “Cave of the Sink”) near Ronda, Spain (in 1959 or 1960). George developed a passion for exploring caves, which then became his lifelong interest and area of professional research. George's cave studies led him around the world to many unique locations. He made his 905th recorded trip into a cave on September 28, 2001 (having recorded his trips only since 1964).

George participated in early hydrological studies at *Mammoth Cave National Park* in 1975, under the tutelage of the renowned cave geologist, Jim Quinlan. Over the next three decades, George distinguished himself as one of the leading cave management experts in the United States. His intense passion for caves quickly enticed Betty to join him on cave trips, after they met on a field trip to the *Grand Canyon* in 1976. She rapidly also became interested in caves and karst groundwater problems. Together, they

worked on karst and cave research projects and wrote many professional articles. Their personal lives were much enriched by their intertwined professional interests.

George combined the scientific study of caves and his love of traveling with a professional career in geology and geography. In addition, he had natural talents in teaching, so he prepared himself for teaching at the college/university level. After filling several temporary teaching and research positions in Idaho, Colorado, and Tennessee, he joined the University of Wisconsin at La Crosse (UW-L) in 1979. There he became Professor of Geography and Earth Science, a position he retained the rest of his life. He was voted Chair of the Department of Geography and Earth Science twice, and worked tirelessly to promote geographic education at UW-L. He worked with many colleagues across the university on various committees over his 22+ years there.

George believed personal experience to be a powerful educational tool, so he organized and led field trips for students to caves and karst areas (particularly in Wisconsin and Minnesota), and to visit many other areas throughout the U.S., as well as several places in Canada, Mexico, and Russia. He served UW-L and the La Crosse community by leading many trips to local caves for Scout troops and students of all ages. His trips always incorporated a message of the need to protect caves for their intrinsic values as well as the need to protect the groundwater in every karst area, which is a fragile resource that is frequently used for drinking water.

George's caving included trips to hundreds of caves in many parts of the U.S.; and to caves in Canada, Jamaica, San Salvador Island (Bahamas), Cuba, England, France, Australia, China, Hong Kong, Hawaii, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Brazil. He was particularly delighted to visit the "Kras" area of Slovenia, which is the area first to be scientifically described ("type-section") well over 100 years ago where solutional caves are found, and where groundwater resources are fragile. (This work defined what is now known as a "karst" area.) George was also honored to visit the famous *Lascaux Cave* in France. This famous cave, with Paleolithic drawings

and paintings of animals, is one of 16 sites named together as the "Decorated Grottoes of the Vezere Valley" and is designated a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site. The drawings and paintings in the cave are exceedingly fragile, and therefore visitation is extremely restricted.

George published numerous academic papers and articles for scientific and caving publications. He was one of the early proponents of the Underground Wilderness concept, and dedicated extensive articles to public education about caves and cave management. He volunteered many thousands of hours to the American Cave Conservation Association (ACCA) and the National Speleological Society (NSS). He was one of the first Directors of the ACCA, and served on the ACCA Board of Directors since 1982. He was the ACCA Vice President for Conservation over the past decade. George also served in various capacities in the NSS, such as director of the NSS Cave Management Section; Chairman of the NSS Cave Conservation and Management Section; Social Science/Exploration Editor of *GEO* (a geology/geography publication of the NSS); and Associate Editor-Conservation of the *Journal of Caves and Karst Studies* (formerly, *NSS Bulletin*). George was honored with a "Fellow" and the Outstanding Service Award from the National Speleological Society and as a Fellow of the renowned Explorers Club.

George will particularly be remembered by his devoted wife and many relatives, professional colleagues, students, and by nearly everyone he met, for his energy, his enthusiasm for life, and his love of learning. A simple example is that he always requested a window seat on every air flight, and carefully studied the landscape, to identify rivers, mountains, cities, and other features. He loved to share his knowledge with whoever sat next to him. He also captured much of his travels on film, and shared the story of each trip with family and friends. While his loss to the cave conservation community will be deeply felt, so too will he be missed by all of us who knew and loved him well.

Acknowledgments: Obituary Notice written by Betty Wheeler (published with her permission); personal communication with Louise Hose and E. Calvin Alexander Jnr. (including excerpts of their recent emails) published with their permission.