

ROLEX AND EXPLORATION – 1933 TO 2019 A COMMITMENT TO A PERPETUAL PLANET

For the founder of Rolex, Hans Wilsdorf, the world was like a living laboratory. He began to use it as a testing ground for his watches from the 1930s, sending them to the most extreme locations, supporting explorers who ventured into the unknown. But the world has changed. As the 21st century unfolds, exploration for pure discovery has given way to exploration as a means to preserve the natural world. Rolex continues the legacy of its founder, supporting the explorers of today on their new mission: to make the planet perpetual.

To this aim, in 2019, Rolex is launching a campaign titled Perpetual Planet. For now, it embraces an enhanced partnership with the National Geographic Society to study the impacts of climate change, as well as Sylvia Earle’s Mission Blue initiative to safeguard the oceans through a network of marine protected “Hope Spots”. It also encompasses the Rolex Awards for Enterprise that recognize individuals with projects that advance knowledge and protect human well-being and the environment.

LONG HISTORY OF SUPPORT FOR EXPLORATION

For nearly a century, Rolex has been an active supporter of pioneering explorers, individuals who have pushed back the boundaries of human endeavour by venturing to the most extreme places on Earth to shed light on the natural world. Rolex watches have accompanied these explorers to the highest mountains and to the ocean depths, serving as precise, reliable tools. In turn, these groundbreaking expeditions have proved to be the perfect living laboratory for the brand to test and develop its timepieces.

EXPLORING THE EXTREMES

Rolex is linked to some of the greatest feats of exploration of the past century. In **1933**, the brand equipped the British Everest Expedition and again, in **1953**, on Sir John Hunt’s historic expedition when Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay became the first men to reach the summit of Mount Everest.

In honour of this Everest milestone, Rolex launched the Explorer watch in **1953**. The Explorer model was eventually improved with a reinforced case and a more legible dial for extreme conditions. Since that time, the Explorer has benefited from every technical advance to Rolex watches, though its appearance remains the same.

In keeping with this support of exploration, in **1954**, Rolex formed one of the brand's most enduring partnerships – an alliance with the National Geographic Society, which would take on historic implications over the years.

By **1960**, Rolex's involvement with exploration took a new turn – descending rather than ascending – to the Mariana Trench in the western Pacific, the deepest point in the oceans, the equivalent of the height of Mount Everest plus some 2,000 metres.

The bathyscaphe *Trieste*, piloted by Jacques Piccard and Don Walsh, carried an experimental Rolex Oyster watch, the Deep Sea Special, fixed to its exterior as it descended to a record depth of 10,916 metres (35,800 feet). The watch was working perfectly when the vessel resurfaced despite the immense pressure. Piccard and Walsh remained the only people to reach the bottom of the ocean for the next half century.

In light of its increased involvement with exploration, in **1971**, Rolex launched the Explorer II, featuring a date display, an additional 24-hour hand and a fixed bezel with a 24-hour graduation, enabling the wearer to distinguish hours of the day from those of the night. This was essential for exploration in dark environments – the depths of caves, for example – or polar regions that experience six months each of daylight and darkness.

ROLEX AND ITS PARTNERS IN EXPLORATION

Today's explorers are increasingly concerned about the balance of the Earth's ecosystems. Accordingly, the purpose of their expeditions and projects has transitioned from discovery to drawing attention to the planet's fragility, as well as catalyse and design solutions to the Earth's environmental challenges. Through its partnerships and relationships, Rolex is championing these explorers as part of its commitment to a Perpetual Planet.

OUR WORLD-UNDERWATER SCHOLARSHIP SOCIETY

In **1974**, Rolex joined forces with the Our World-Underwater Scholarship Society, a global community of marine professionals whose research is dedicated to the oceans. Through this relationship, the company has provided funding for scholarships to young people considering careers in the underwater world.

ROLEX AWARDS FOR ENTERPRISE

A programme that launched Rolex into the forefront of corporate social responsibility is the biennial Rolex Awards for Enterprise. Since **1976**, the brand has assisted 140 individuals who have a new or ongoing project anywhere in the world – one deserving support for its capacity to improve lives or to protect the world's natural and cultural heritage. Five new Laureates will be announced on 14 June 2019.

Among explorers who have benefited from the Awards are: Francesco Sauro, who is leading scientific expeditions deep into the caves of South America's remote table-top mountains; Cristian Donoso, who kayaks in the open seas of Western Patagonia, documenting this dramatic region in the hope others will understand its

value; Joseph Cook, who is studying the Greenland ice sheet to understand the influence microorganisms have on global warming; and Lonnie Dupre, whose Arctic expeditions aim to draw attention to the perils of climate change.

In addition to its indelible links with exploration, through the programme, Rolex has contributed to the preservation of 17 ecosystems that are crucial for biodiversity and for the human communities that depend on them. These include the Mamirauá Sustainable Development Reserve in the Brazilian state of Amazonas, the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve in Mexico, the Atlantic forests in Brazil and the Gran Chaco in South America. The brand has also assisted Laureates to help protect 23 endangered species, from the Amur tiger to the hornbill, the tiny seahorse and the world's biggest fish, the whale shark.

New tracking technologies developed by Rolex Laureates provide electronic eyes in the wild and are proving a powerful weapon in the race to save endangered species. English zoologist Rory Wilson's Daily Diary, for example, is a lightweight electronic logger that provides valuable data on the behaviour of animals such as penguins and leopards.

EXPLORERS LINKED TO ROLEX

From the early 1980s through to the early years of the new millennium, many explorers, including mountaineers, divers and scientists, became associated with Rolex or became brand Testimonees, breaking records and testing their endurance while equipped with Oyster Perpetual watches. Rolex timepieces have been constant companions and key tools in their work. This group includes:

- German-born American conservationist **George Schaller**, who has been instrumental in preventing the destruction of environments; he has helped establish more than 20 wildlife reserves around the world and protect some of the most endangered animals, including mountain gorillas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and snow leopards in Mongolia.
- Paleoanthropologist and conservationist **Richard Leakey**, renowned for his fossil finds related to human evolution and his campaigning for responsible environmental management in East Africa.
- American mountaineer **Ed Viesturs**, who scaled all 14 of the world's 8,000-metre peaks without supplemental oxygen during his Endeavor 8000 project, which he completed in 2005.
- **Junko Tabei**, the Japanese mountaineer and first woman to reach the summit of Everest in 1975. Later she became a powerful advocate for the protection of the mountain environment, quantifying the impact of human waste on the mountain in her postgraduate degree in environmental science.

- Belgian polar explorer and mountaineer **Alain Hubert**, who in 2002 created the International Polar Foundation (IPF) to support polar science as a key to understanding climate change. The IPF raised funds to build a new international research station in Antarctica, designed to operate on renewable energies. Hubert believes these ventures can be formidable vehicles of communication about our planet.
- Swiss-Canadian mountaineer **Jean Troillet**, who climbed Everest in 1986, and in 1997 became the first man to descend the North Face on a snowboard. Troillet holds the record for the fastest ascent of Everest’s North Face and has climbed 10 of the 8,000-metre peaks, all without supplemental oxygen.
- Norwegian **Rune Gjeldnes**, who in 2006 became the only person to cross the three big ice sheets – Greenland, the Arctic Ocean and Antarctica – on skis, unaided.

OTHER KEY PARTNERSHIPS

THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

Although Rolex officially became a corporate benefactor of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) in London in **2002**, the brand has a long-established association with the RGS that harks back to the 1930s when it began equipping Mount Everest expeditions. Over the years, Rolex has supported many historic expeditions, including in 1986 the investigation of the early development of the Wahiba Sands in Oman, its ecosystem and the impact of recent change in Oman’s deserts. The expedition documented the diversity of terrain, noting 16,000 invertebrates, 200 species of other wildlife and 150 species of native flora. Its insights may help protect other threatened deserts.

SYLVIA EARLE’S MISSION BLUE

Sylvia Earle, a Rolex Testimonee since 1982, has been a pioneer of ocean exploration for nearly 50 years. In 1970, the Rolex Testimonee participated in one of the most ambitious underwater habitat programmes. As a member of Tektite II, an all-female mission, she lived and worked alongside other scientists in a pair of metal silos anchored on the seabed in the US Virgin Islands, carrying out research and a variety of tasks. A committed advocate of the oceans, she is driven to inspire others to see for themselves their beauty and vulnerability.

Since **2010**, through her Mission Blue initiative, Earle has inspired communities and governments to shield marine life that is at risk from human pressures through Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) she calls Hope Spots. These are areas of the oceans designated as being vital to the preservation of species, from the range of diversity a particular site displays or its significance as a home to endemic, rare or endangered species, or places where local communities rely on a healthy marine environment for their survival.

With the support of Rolex since **2014**, the number of Hope Spots has increased from 50 to 112 over the past five years. Earle aims to protect 30 per cent of the world's oceans by 2030. Currently, 8 per cent of the oceans are protected.

Some Hope Spots have been created in existing MPAs. For situations where there is no existing protection, once applications for Hope Spot status are approved by the Mission Blue council – in partnership with the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) – work on a conservation plan begins with local populations, environmental organizations and governments.

Palau, a group of islands in Micronesia, is a Hope Spot. “Eighty per cent ... is now a safe haven for wildlife and 20 per cent is managed so that the local population can continue to draw on the ocean for their livelihood,” says Earle.

UNDER THE POLE EXPEDITIONS

Rolex sponsors the Under The Pole expeditions that push the boundaries of underwater exploration. The inaugural expedition in **2010**, Deepsea Under the Pole by Rolex, created a photographic and film report on the undersea world of the Arctic ice caps near the geographic North Pole. The team also measured the thickness of snow on the ice, crucial to estimating the total volume of ice. The resulting images of the top and bottom of the ice caps provided a portrait of a dream world being lost through global warming.

MONACO BLUE INITIATIVE

The Monaco Blue Initiative was launched in 2010 at the behest of His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco. Its members meet annually to discuss the global challenges of ocean protection and preservation. Rolex has been a partner of the organization since **2011**.

BACK TO THE DEEP

Echoing the first manned descent to the Mariana Trench in 1960, film-maker and Rolex Testimonee James Cameron completed his solo dive in **2012** aboard the *DEEPSEA CHALLENGER*, which carried an experimental diver's watch, the Rolex Deepsea Challenge, on its robotic manipulator arm. The watch, waterproof to 12,000 metres (39,370 feet), resisted more than 12 tonnes of pressure on its crystal, kept perfect time and emerged from the water unscathed.

ENHANCED PARTNERSHIPS

Rolex supports organizations and initiatives raising environmental awareness and fosters tomorrow's explorers, scientists and conservationists through scholarships and grants.

Beginning in **2017**, the company has provided project funding each year for up to five young explorers through The Rolex Explorers Club Grants. The grants are given in partnership with The Explorers Club in New York, established in 1904 to fund and promote scientific exploration.



On the latest Under The Pole III expeditions (**2017–2021**), divers and scientists are sailing from the Arctic to the Antarctic, by way of the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, to explore ecosystems and complete research in marine biology, polar systems and diver physiology. In French Polynesia, they are studying the local reef ecosystem, which requires deep, extremely technical diving to the twilight zone. They are also developing and testing a diving capsule that will permit them to stay underwater for extended periods to observe marine life. Their work will provide vital information about the health of the oceans.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

In **2017**, Rolex enhanced its long-standing partnership with the National Geographic Society to promote exploration and conservation. Now the two organizations have come together to plan a series of three innovative expeditions answering critical questions about the impacts of climate change on extreme environments. The partnership will harness world-renowned scientific expertise and cutting-edge technology to reveal new insights about the impacts of climate change on the systems that are vital to life on Earth: mountains as the world's water towers, rainforests as the planet's lungs, and the ocean as its cooling system.

The first expedition supported by this partnership is to Mount Everest and runs from April to June 2019. The Everest expedition team, led by National Geographic and Tribhuvan University, aims to understand better the effects of climate change on the glaciers of the Hindu Kush-Himalaya that provide critical water resources to 1 billion people downstream. This information, coupled with additional data sets on water supply and demand in the region, will form the basis of a new index to track the health of the Himalayan water system and inform decisions to help protect it.

PERPETUATING THE LEGACY

The vision and values of Hans Wilsdorf still guide the company today. From exploration for pure discovery to exploration as a means to preserve the natural world, Rolex continues the legacy of its founder.

For nearly a century, Rolex has supported pioneering explorers, pushing back the boundaries of human endeavour. With the Perpetual Planet campaign, launched in 2019, Rolex is committed for the long term to support the explorers in their quest to protect the environment. To start with, this commitment focuses on the Rolex Awards for Enterprise and partnerships with the National Geographic Society and Sylvia Earle's Mission Blue initiative. But this is just the beginning.

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