



WATCHWORD

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Rolex clocks up forty years in South Africa

Nineteen eighty-eight is a significant year in the history of Rolex as it commemorates the anniversaries of several achievements:

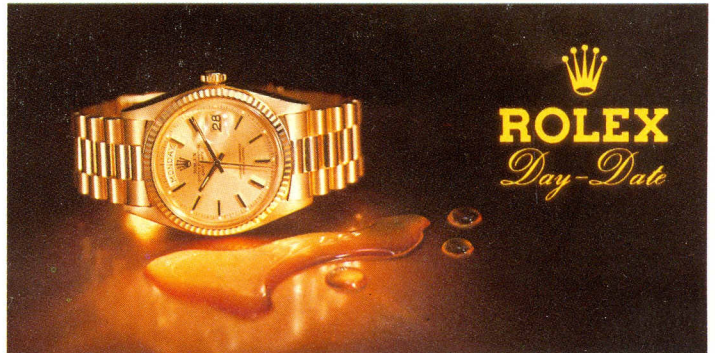
- Rolex has now been in South Africa for forty years. On 9 June, 1948, the Rolex Watch Company (South Africa) (Pty) Limited was established. Prior to that time, the Rolex representation in South Africa was handled by selected concessionaires dealing directly with Rolex, Geneva.

- Nineteen eighty-eight marks the tenth anniversary of the launch of the Rolex Oysterquartz which was then guaranteed waterproof to 165 ft/50m and today to 330 ft/100m. This calendar analogue timepiece combines

an eleven-jewelled movement and a quartz-linked motor; and operates normally in magnetic fields up to 1 000 Oersted.

- It is 35 years ago that the British Himalayan Expedition led by Sir John Hunt became the first to reach the summit of Mt Everest. The expedition was equipped with Rolex Oyster Perpetual Chronometers which functioned perfectly throughout, despite extremes of temperature and treatment.

- It is also 35 years since Rolex introduced the world's first wrist-watch especially made for scuba divers — the 'Submariner' — which was guaranteed waterproof to a depth of 330 ft/100m and is now guaranteed to 990 ft/300m.



Forty years of Rolex technology.

Forty below — and still ticking

Graham Blyth — a meteorologist who served during the 27th South African Antarctic Expedition to the ice continent in 1986 — recently supplied Rolex with a story and pictures of his year-long stay in the Antarctic.

Like some of the other famous explorers, mountain climbers and lone venturers that have become the hallmark of Rolex's advertising world-wide, Blyth has a tale to tell about his Rolex Explorer watch.

Graham acquired his Rolex Explorer just days before setting off on the SA Agulhas for the long trip south — a trip which required venturing out in temperatures of less than minus 40 degrees Celsius to photograph the magnificent Southern Lights and other breathtaking snowscapes.

One of his greatest challenges as a photographer was contending with mid-winter in the Antarctic where the last rays of the sun disappear over the horizon at the end of May.

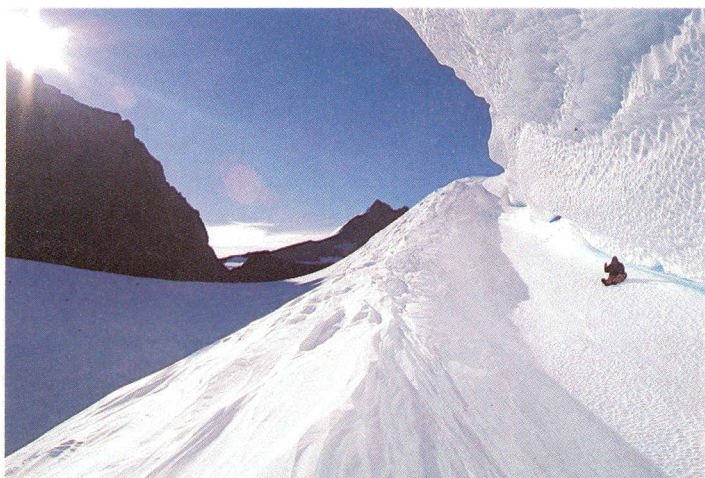
Auroral lights

This is followed by continual darkness accompanied by temperatures of minus 40 degrees Celsius. At times, however, the sky is lit by awe-inspiring, swirling green auroral lights.

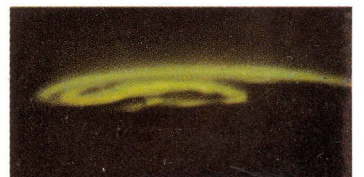
Blyth says, "It was here that my Rolex Explorer really came into a class of its own. Capturing the Southern Lights on film is extremely difficult, requiring long exposures in freezing conditions.

"I attached my Rolex to the tripod and the luminous numerals and watch-hands made it easy for me to take accurate exposures. In fact, mine was the only watch to work satisfactorily in that extreme cold."

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Windscoop on side of mountain.



Aurora Australis.



Ice stalactites and stalagmites in abandoned SANAE base.

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The SANAE base where he and the rest of the team lived for a year, is constructed from ARMCO corrugated steel and situated 13 kilometres from the edge of a main ice shelf.

Glacial movement

Built on a glacier, the base moves at approximately 60 metres a year towards the edge of the ice. Snow and ice accumulate on and around the base at a rate of one to two metres a year and SANAE, built in 1980 to replace the previous one, is already 14 metres below the ice surface.

Although the living quarters are heated, the temperature in the passage between sections of the base regularly drops to minus 40 degrees Celsius during the winter months.

In addition to the main base, there is an emergency base which is designed differently. Built above the surface, the emergency base is raised by each incoming SANAE team so that it remains about eight metres clear of ice.

Storm destruction

During the 1986 expedition, the team had to work around the clock for ten days to clear the emergency base. A violent storm destroyed all their hard work in a matter of

hours — reflecting the nature of the breathtakingly beautiful Antarctic which still remains untamed by Man.

Blyth's Rolex remained intact throughout adverse Antarctic conditions. It kept time despite the freezing cold and long hours of work with a jackhammer during repeated operations to uncover supplies and equipment from metres of snow which covered them after every storm.

He points out an added advantage of the Rolex: "During the summer months everyone has to wear goggles and cope with glare from the ice. Unlike many other makes of watches — particularly digital ones — the dial of my Rolex was easily read, even through the strongest polarising lenses."

Apart from the cold and continual storms, winter in the Antarctic brings other problems. Team members

are confined to the base for days or weeks at a stretch during which some suffer from 'mid-winter insomnia' or 'big-eye'.

"I suffered from 'big-eye' for a while and sometimes did not sleep for up to four days while at other times I managed to sleep for a few hours," says Blyth.

"When you wake up you don't know if it's AM or PM — or even the date. You could have been asleep for 12 minutes or 12 hours and you haven't even got the sun to orientate you. I would have been lost without my Rolex with the date and 24-hour hand functions."

Award Ustica

The International Academy of Underwater Sciences and Techniques presented the Award Ustica to Montres Rolex on the island of Ustica (near Palermo Sicily) on 4 July 1987.

This award was instituted in 1985 and distinguishes organisations which have excelled in the field of underwater activities. Congratulations, Montres Rolex!



Walking on sea-ice between icebergs.

Hans Wilsdorf — the Rolex genius

Hans Wilsdorf was the founder of Rolex who, nearly a century ago, began the pursuit of perfection which has become the Rolex tradition.

He was born at Kulmbach in Bavaria in 1881. At 19 he went to work for Cumo Korsten, an exporter of watches and clocks, in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland.

In 1903 young Wilsdorf was attracted to London — then the economic centre of the world.

Business was good and watch and clock importers prospered. However, to Wilsdorf's critical eye, their working methods were lacking as quality was largely neglected. It was then that he formed the ideal for perfection in his craft.

Wrist-watch début

In 1905 he founded the London firm 'Wilsdorf & Davis'. He was determined to launch the wrist-watch, despite the fact that the pocket-watch was universally popular and the market was controlled by a few important and powerful manufacturers.

Horological circles were wary of the wrist-watch not only because of the small movements which it necessitated, but also because it had to withstand all the shocks caused by continual movements of the wrist.

Wilsdorf contacted the firm Aegler of Bienne and placed his first and extremely important order, for it represented a sum five times greater than that of the capital base of 'Wilsdorf & Davis'.

Aegler provided his customer with movements small

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