

The History of the Rolex Explorer I

By: rolex.watchprosite.com

Climbers pay tribute to Rolex



Shorpa Tensing Norker, G.M., stayed a few weeks in Switzerland on his way home to Darjeeling. While there, he visited the headquarters of the Rolex Watch Company and gave his opinion of Rolex: "Four watches are splendid under worst conditions. Not this time only but on other expeditions to Everest that I went as member."

"I received the watch on March 29th at Jaynagar on the Nepalese border, and throughout the whole of the British Cho Oya Expedition, until we finally reached India again some 14 weeks later, I wore the watch continuously, night and day, and on no occasion did it stop or require winding. In the course of the expedition it experienced considerable extremes of temperature, from the great heat of India to the cold temperatures at over 20,000 feet, and seemed unaffected by the knocks it received on rock cliffs or the continual jarring of long spells of stop cutting in ice.

To me an accurate watch is a novelty. I am one of those unfortunate people whose watches, for some strange reason, always seem to go slow. So adjustment seems to be a constant. However this Rolex has been a different matter altogether. Its accuracy is all one could desire and it has run continuously without winding ever since I put it on some nine months ago ... I count your watch amongst my most treasured possessions."

E.P. Hillary

On his return from the 1953 British Himalayan Expedition, Sir Edmund Hillary sent to Rolex these comments on his Oyster Perpetual

The Rolex Oyster Perpetual watches, with which members of the British team were equipped, again proved their dependability on Everest. We were delighted that they kept such accurate time. This ensured that synchronization of time between the members of the team was maintained throughout, and the Oyster case lived up to its reputation, gained on many previous expeditions, for protecting the movement. Our Rolex Oysters were completely waterproof, unharmed by immersion in snow, and withstood the extreme change of temperature from the warm humidity of the foothills to the great cold at the high camps.

It is not least, the Perpetual self-winding mechanism relieved the team from the trouble of winding their watches. At heights of over twenty-five thousand feet this is really necessary, because the wind blows up and such details as winding watches can be forgotten. There was no need either to slip off warm gloves to attend to this detail.

As I have emphasized before, this expedition was built on the experience and achievement of others. Rolex Oyster watches have accompanied many previous pioneering expeditions. They performed splendidly, and we have indeed come to look upon Rolex Oysters as an important part of high alpine equipment.

John Hunt

From COLONEL SIR JOHN HUNT

HIMALAYAN ROLL OF HONOUR

Rolex Oyster watches were worn on these historic Himalayan Expeditions

- 1933 British Everest Expedition that reached 28,150 feet.
- 1933 Houston Expedition that flew over Everest for the first time.
- 1934 Expedition to Nanda-Devi—Eric Shipton and H. W. Tilman.
- 1935 British Everest Reconnaissance Expedition led by Eric Shipton.
- 1936 British Everest Expedition led by Hugh Rutledge.
- 1937 British Reconnaissance Expedition to Shaksgam led by Eric Shipton.
- 1938 British Everest Expedition led by H. W. Tilman.
- 1939 Expedition to Karakoram led by Eric Shipton.
- 1947 Swiss Alpine Club Expedition to Gangotri.
- 1949 Swiss Himalayan Expedition to Garhwal.
- 1952 French Himalayan Expedition to Garhwal.
- 1952 Swiss Alpine Everest Expedition led by Dr. Wyss-Dunant.
- 1952 Swiss Alpine Everest Expedition led by Dr. Chevalley.
- 1952 British Himalayan Expedition led by Eric Shipton.
- 1953 BRITISH EVEREST EXPEDITION LED BY COLONEL SIR JOHN HUNT.



The ROLEX OYSTER PERPETUAL that accompanied the victorious British Everest Expedition. Waterproof, self-winding, and a miracle of accuracy, this watch is the highest achievement of the watchmaking industry.



ROLEX

A landmark in the history of Time measurement

THE ROLEX WATCH COMPANY LIMITED 11, WILSDORF, GOVERNING DIRECTOR 1 GREEN STREET, MAYFAIR, LONDON, W.1

1950's Rolex ad for the Explorer

Most people believe that the Explorer I was launched by Rolex for commemorating the Everest expedition and that this watch was with British explorer team consisting of Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay etc on 29th, May of 1953, achieving a great task of human being climbing. This story is definitely magic and attractive, but it still has a certain distance to the real fact. Rolex indeed had supported Himalayan expedition since 1933, and later in Everest expeditions, Rolex had been always the official supporters, so Rolex supported each explorer team with its wristwatch. However, Rolex was not the only supporter: it is said that when Edmund Hillary climbed up on the top of Everest, what he wore was a watch from the British supporter Smith. But what Tenzing Norgay wore was indeed an Explorer.

The Explorer was based on the already existing tough and hard wearing *bubbleback*, which has been modified by Rolex for the more active and adventurous customer. In 1952, the references 6098 and 6150 (both using the A296 movement) were in fact the first prototypes of Explorer to be used by climbers; they were watches with white dials and leaf shaped hands and did not bear the name Explorer yet.



Edmund Hillary's Rolex

In 1953, these models became the references 6298 and 6350 when they were fitted with the typical *Explorer-type 3-6-9* Arabic dial and later with the *Mercedes* hands.





So you can see that before Hillary and Norgay climbed on the top of Everest, Rolex did not name their watches as Explorer. Although Rolex had registered the trade mark of Explorer in Geneva on 26th, Jan of 1953, the Explorer gained its name after Hillary and Norgay climbing up Everest, that is, "Explorer" began to be added on Ref.6350 after the successful climbing of 1953.

Anyway, Ref. 6350 was indeed specially made for Explorers by Rolex: it has a highly readable dial design, and its case is also specially strengthened and uses special lubricant making this watch usable between -20° C and +40° C. Ref. 6150 was stopped in 1959 and replaced by Ref. 6610. Ref. 6610 and Ref. 6150 are almost the same, but since Ref. 6610 used the new Cal. 1030 movement, the back is more flat.

ROLEX OYSTER PERPETUAL EXPLORER

OYSTER CASE, GENEVA-MADE — guaranteed water-proof to 330 feet, machined from solid block of Swedish stainless steel.

SELF-WINDING PERPETUAL ROTOR MECHANISM

OFFICIALLY CERTIFIED CHRONOMETER with mention "Especially Good Results"

AMAGNETIC

EXCLUSIVE MATCHING ROLEX BRACE-LET with special safety clasp.



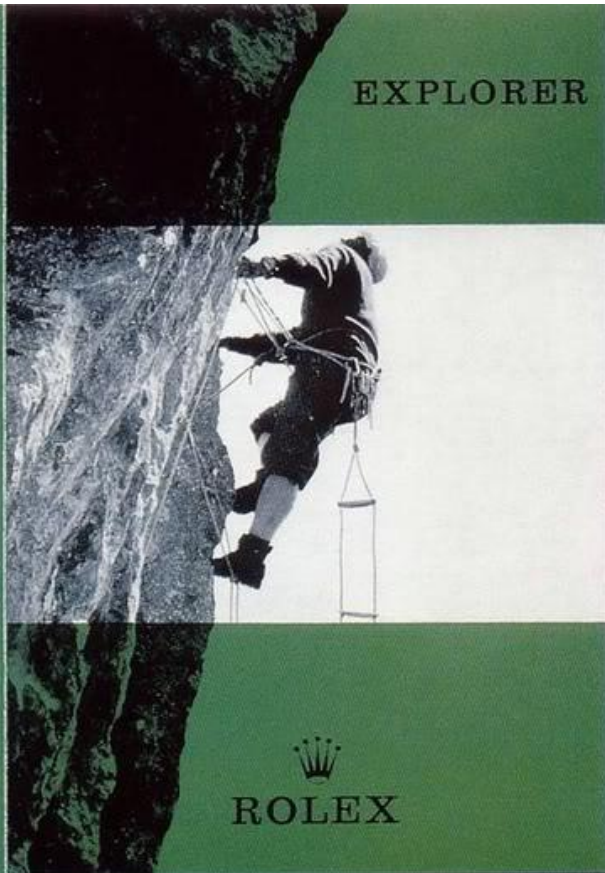
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EXPLORER




ROLEX

The Explorer, an Oyster Perpetual Chronometer, was created specially for the first successful Everest expedition. The specification was simple yet exacting — to design a thoroughly dependable, shockproof rugged watch to perform in the most difficult circumstances. After the expedition had successfully completed its mission, we received these comments:

BRIGADIER SIR JOHN HUNT

... As I have emphasized before, this expedition was built on the experience and achievement of others. Rolex Oyster watches have accompanied many previous pioneering expeditions. They performed splendidly and we have indeed come to look upon Rolex Oysters as an important part of high climbing equipment...



SIR EDMUND HILLARY

... I wore the watch (Rolex Oyster Perpetual) continuously night and day... In the course of the expedition it experienced considerable extremes of temperature from the great heat of India to the cold temperatures at over 22,000 feet and seemed unaffected by the knocks it received on the rock climbs or the continual jarring of long spells of step cutting in ice... Its accuracy is all one could desire and it has run continuously ever since I put it on some nine months ago...

SHERPA TENSING

... your watches behaved splendidly under any and all the worst conditions imaginable, not only this time but also on previous expeditions to Mount Everest, of which I happened to have also been a member.

The Explorer has become recognized the world over as the watch for climbers, cave explorers, skiers:

BRITISH NORTH GREENLAND EXPEDITION

... occasional time signals broadcast from England proved that my Rolex watch was maintaining a remarkable accuracy. On no occasion did it require to be wound by hand. When on the ice-cap, away from base for several weeks at a time, it was of inestimable value to have on my wrist a watch whose accuracy could be relied upon at all times...

ARGENTINE ARMY EXPEDITION TO THE ANTARCTIC

An officer says:

As a pilot of a Cessna reconnaissance plane and later at the base of Sobral (81° S latitude and 40° W longitude) I had occasions to test out the qualities of my Rolex. It was exposed to temperatures of -53° C and to very rugged conditions. Its accuracy and reliability make it of incalculable value to all who have to work in completely adverse conditions, such as are found in the Antarctic.

BRITISH SPELEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION TO THE CANTABRIAN MOUNTAINS (SPAIN)

Caving is not a gentle activity and of necessity the Rolex Explorer watches received a great deal of rough treatment including immersion in mud and water, and scratching and banging against rock, but the accurate reading of time, which is an important safety factor in caving, never gave us any worries.

A. C. Huntington



ROYAL SOCIETY ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION

(My Rolex) ... became part of me — an unquestioned, reliable part — doing no more than gain a matter of seconds per week, although exposed to such extremes of temperature as a hot cooking stove, or digging out stores in minus 60° Fahrenheit.

Surgeon Lt.-Col. Dalghosh, Leader Advance Party

The Explorer has a specially strengthened **pressure-proof** Oyster case which is waterproof and swimproof to 330 feet. It has been specially designed, with its officially certified chronometer movement, to be fully shockproof, to withstand the jars and knocks of mountain climbing, of exploring. It can safely be worn while operating a pneumatic drill or cutting rock-steps. It is self-wound by the Rolex Perpetual mechanism and the mainspring cannot overwind. Like all Rolex Oysters, the Explorer has the exclusive Twinlock screw-down winding button. The crown becomes an integral part of the case and is protected against accidental damage.

Not everyone is an explorer but there are many who are forced to treat their watch roughly. With the Explorer you can at last own a really accurate watch that is tough.



PEOPLE DO NOT DECIDE TO BECOME EXTRAORDINARY.
THEY DECIDE TO ACCOMPLISH
EXTRAORDINARY THINGS.

On May 29, 1953, at 11:30 a.m., Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay became the first men to stand on the summit of Mt. Everest. But the top of the mountain was just the beginning of Sir Edmund's journey. More than half a century later, his perpetual pursuit of things once imagined has resulted in the construction of schools, hospitals, medical clinics, bridges and freshwater pipelines for the people of the Himalayas. He may have left his footprint on a mountain, but he put his indelible imprint on the world. Proving once again that some people are simply destined to rise to the top.




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