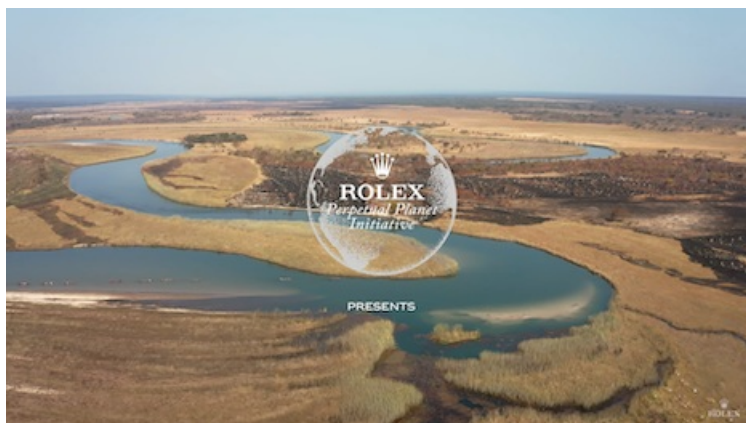


SUSTAINABILITY

## Rolex honors heritage of exploration with African 'Perpetual Planet' expedition

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*Rolex Perpetual Planet is an extension of the brand's history of supporting explorers, lending watches and funding. Image credit: Rolex*

By EMILY IRIS DEGN

Swiss watchmaker Rolex is supporting the research efforts of South African National Geographic Explorer and Rolex Perpetual Planet Initiative partner Dr. Steve Boyes on the Lungwevungu River, a tributary of the giant Zambezi River.

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The research project is part of the Rolex Perpetual Planet initiative. The effort is a nod to founder Hans Wilsdorf's support of explorers.

"Together with our partners at Rolex, we will harness the power of science, exploration, and storytelling to reveal critical insights about our changing world, advance understanding, and scale up solutions toward achieving a planet in balance," said Tracy R. Wolstencroft, president and CEO of the [National Geographic Society](#), in a statement.

### Perpetually exploring

Since its founding, Rolex has been a proponent of discovery, supporting the adventures of explorers around the world.

Mr. Wilsdorf viewed the wild reaches of the planet as the perfect testing lab for his watches, sending them with explorers on their journeys in the 1930s. While explorers are generally no longer finding new locations, the field lives on as a subset of conservation work.

### Perpetual Planet

Since 2019, Rolex has been embracing that changing landscape of exploration through its [Perpetual Planet](#) initiative, supporting the work of exploring conservationists.

Part of this project involves the work of Rolex Awards for Enterprise winners, who work to protect the livability of the planet and the welfare of people. Rolex is also working with the National Geographic Society, collecting data in the fight against climate change.

Dr. Boyes is a National Geographic Explorer, leading one of the [Great Spine of Africa expeditions](#) along over 500

miles of the Lungwevungu River.

The river is a tributary water source of the Zambezi River, which is vital to 20 million people and an inordinate amount of plants and animals, supporting Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

#### The Great Spine of Africa Expeditions: Lungwevungu River Ep. 2

Traversing the highlands of Angola to the border of Zambia, the team is collecting measurements and data on their journey. With his Rolex watch and team in tow, he is floating in dug-out "mekoro" canoes and camping along the river, documenting the data.

"It's almost biblical," said Dr. Boyes in a statement.

"During the day you are constantly stung, and at night beetles, flying ants and moths fill the air," he said. "It's a very difficult place to do science, to live, to do anything."

Despite its importance, much of the Zambezi's tributaries and life cycles is a mystery to scientists, making this expedition key in building local climate resilience. Being the birthplace of the Zambezi, the Lungwevungu is a key point in these conservation efforts.



*Dr. Boyes takes measurements along the river, wearing his water-resistant watch. Image credit: Rolex*

The other expeditions taking place in the Spine of Africa will explore the Congo, Niger and Nile rivers all just as important to 400 million Africans. Like this Lungwevungu expedition, much of the data collected is being sourced from places never studied by scientists before.

"If it's measurable, we are absolutely going to measure it," said Dr. Boyes in a statement.

"It is incredibly important for us to be able to measure change over time, to be able to pick up limits of acceptable change, then take those to the government and say that we need to change policy."

#### Nature of luxury

Rolex is not alone in this undertaking of scientific exploration.

De Beers recently supported National Geographic's conservation efforts in the Okavango Delta ([see story](#)).

The initiative funded the work of experts and scientists in educating locals on environmentalism. The support also secured sustainable sources of income, ecotourism and infrastructure to the delta basin.



*Scientific research teams travel along the 500 miles of tributary waters, collecting first-time data for the region. Image credit: Rolex*

Even more recent is Prada's collaboration with UNESCO. The brand is funding children's oceanic education in Italy,

using revenue from its Re-Nylon efforts ([see story](#)).

Prada's repurposing of plastic waste is not just funding the environmental literacy of children, but is also backing the scientists and educators that make that knowledge accessible, making the project both environmentally and socially conscientious.

As Gen Z further drives the luxury market, more luxury brands are signaling that they share the values of the demographic. The community-minded, progressive instincts of the generation is leaking into marketing campaigns of luxury giants, as positive change finds a place in consumerism.

Rolex is especially well-positioned for this turn towards conservation and sustainability, as the brand has a history of integrating them into their company culture and projects already. This work, however, is especially dire, according to Dr. Boyes.

"There's a generation of work still to be done on these rivers, establishing baselines, so that we can protect them properly."

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