

The Telegraph

Luis Marden

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Luis Marden, who has died aged 90, discovered the wreck of the *Bounty* off Pitcairn Island, retraced the route Christopher Columbus was thought to have taken to the New World, became an expert on the Tonkin bamboo and discovered a new species of orchid and a seawater flea, both named after him. Over 64 years with the National Geographic Society, Marden helped to fill the Society's magazine with colour and adventure. He introduced Kodachrome colour photography and was a pioneer, with Jacques Cousteau, of underwater photography. *Camera Under the Sea* (1956), an account of his voyage aboard Cousteau's yacht *Calypso* in 1955, was the first colour underwater feature to appear in *National Geographic*.

Marden's adventures took him to the furthest corners of the world. A colleague at *National Geographic* was taken aback when, having travelled several thousand miles, he was denied an interview with a hermit living on a rocky promontory off the coast of Alaska because the interview had already been promised to Marden.

Marden enjoyed playing the part of the Edwardian gentleman adventurer. Impeccably well-mannered, he habitually wore tailored Savile Row suits and silk ties, and sported a neatly clipped moustache; a colleague once remarked that Marden's tragedy was that "he was not born a British lord".

But his cufflinks, made of sheathing nails from the *Bounty*, and the *Kama Sutra* images on his tie suggested a more raffish side to his character; and on overseas assignments he tended to blend chameleon-like into his surroundings. A colleague who ran into him in Italy failed to recognise him - the clothes, the manner, even the gestures, were Italian.

Luis Marden was born Annibale Luigi Paragallo at Chelsea, Massachusetts, on January 25 1913. He did not go to university, but nonetheless claimed to have learned to read Egyptian hieroglyphs, and to speak five languages.

He began his career working for a radio station in Boston, where he changed his name to Luis Marden. After a spell as a freelance photographer for the *Boston Herald*, he joined *National Geographic* in 1934 to work in the magazine's photo laboratory.

At that time, *Geographic* photographers habitually travelled into the field with 200lb or so of bulky photographic equipment; instantaneous exposure was unknown. Marden introduced the lightweight Leica and Kodachrome 35mm colour film which produced colour photographs richer than any other

films available at the time, and which soon became standard for the National Geographic and other magazines.

Marden soon succeeded in talking his way on to the magazine's foreign staff and made his debut with a feature about an expedition to the Yucatan peninsula, where he travelled by mule and got the bends after diving into a well which had supposedly been sacred to the Maya.

On other assignments, he persuaded natives in Madagascar to part with two eggs of extinct birds - the dodo and the elephant bird - in exchange for rum. In 1956, after a visit to the Red Sea, he was one of the first people to describe fluorescence, the glow which certain marine species appear to emit in certain light conditions.

His quest for the Bounty began in 1954 when, on a visit to Fiji, he saw the boat's rudder, which had been recovered off Pitcairn Island, in a museum. Three years later, accompanied by Thomas Christian, a descendant of Fletcher Christian, who had led the mutiny in 1789, he set off to explore the sea bed round the island.

After weeks of diving, he recorded, "I could see little squiggles in the surface, a curious marking that resembled nothing so much as petrified worms . . . My heart gave a jump. The squiggles were encrusted sheathing nails, dozens of them. We had found the resting place of the Bounty."

After his official retirement in 1976, Marden was asked by National Geographic's editor, Joseph Judge, to calculate the course of Columbus's voyage from the Canary Islands to America in order to test whether, as generally supposed, he had landed at San Salvador. Working with his wife Ethel, a mathematician, and carefully assessing the effect of ocean currents, Marden replotted the course and, after twice crossing the ocean in his own ketch in 1986, concluded that Columbus had landed at Samana Cay, 65 miles south of San Salvador.

Marden contributed more than 60 articles to National Geographic and made 11 documentary films. His articles were always informed by exhaustive research, and the walls of his office were stacked high with books on celestial navigation, sailboats, fish, orchids, and dictionaries and grammars in languages from Tahitian to Arabic.

When researching an article on bamboo, he grew a stand of Tonkin bamboo in his back garden, from which he made his own split-cane fly-fishing rods. He later wrote *The Angler's Bamboo*, which has become a bible for do-it-yourself fly-fishing rod makers. Marden took up flying microlight aircraft in his seventies, and continued to file stories until 1998.

He is survived by his wife, Ethel.