



ENERGY PROFILE

THE EXTRAORDINARY DR WRIGHT

Words like “incredible” and “unbelievable” may be understatement when applied to Dr Raymond Marcio Wright, well known to ENERGY Caribbean readers as Jamaica’s energy guru.

- At the age of 11, he had already decided that his life’s work would be geology, after having read a Penguin book on the subject when he was nine.

- He acquired four degrees: BSc in geology, MSc in micropaleontology, MPhil in carbonate sedimentology, palaeoecology and micropalaeontology, and PhD in sedimentology, sedimentary petrology, mathematical geology, palaeoecology and taxonomy. As a student in the UK working on the first two, he augmented his inadequate scholarship funds by driving lorries between England and Belgium for a grocery firm.

- Back home, after a period as commissioner of mines and director of geological services, he pretty much “invented” the Petroleum Corporation of Jamaica (PCJ) and became its first director of exploration. “I developed the idea of having a state-owned petroleum entity,” he recalls. “At that time [1979], it was clear that, after the two oil shocks of the 70s, one needed to have a state oil company to be able to get supplies of energy from other state companies. That’s how we viewed it, anyway. And we also wanted to find out whether there was any oil and gas in Jamaica itself.” By then, seven wells had been drilled on and offshore by foreign companies.

- He made Jamaica a renewable energy leader, not only in the Caribbean but worldwide. His brief as PCJ’s exploration director included looking into hydropower

and ocean thermal energy conversion (OTEC). “Jamaica was even a world leader in OTEC technology at that time as we were trying to put together an OTEC programme, between 1980 and 1982. Unfortunately OTEC has been slow to take off anywhere.”

- He was one of the three authors of Nicaragua’s petroleum laws during the Sandinista National Liberation Front’s first term in office under President Daniel Ortega. He consulted for the Cuban government on energy matters. Neither of these roles sat well with the US at the time, and Wright suspects the CIA might have opened a file on him.

- While in Nepal “to help write the country’s natural gas regulations”, he seized the opportunity to climb 20,000 feet to the base camp on Mount Everest.

- In 2003, at the age of 63 (he’s now 70), Wright decided “to get on a plane and head straight for Japan to climb Mount Fuji.” Apparently that was a lot tougher than Everest, the world’s highest mountain. “I did get to the top of Mount Fuji, but I actually thought I might die in the attempt. I wrote a quick will, and when I eventually reached the top, I was delirious. There were some beds there, with a Shinto priest, who blesses you. He gave me a blessing but I was completely out. I thought I was on my way to heaven and hearing voices.”

- From mountain top to ocean floor. Wright participated in four deep dives to 15,000-16,000 feet in the Cayman Trench in the mini-sub Alvin, which later went on to find the wreck of the Titanic (he wasn’t aboard for that). “A number of my photographs taken on the Alvin were published in National Geographic magazine,” he recalls.

- Wright is one of the few Caribbean people to have seen the North Pole. This was during an assignment with the Inuits (Eskimos) in the Canadian Arctic, advising on how to negotiate with the Canadian government for oil and gas exploration

on their land. “They chartered a plane and had me flown to the North Pole,” Wright recounts. “What made it a bit scary was that the pilot had to fly by line of sight, since instruments don’t work there because of magnetic interference. All I could see for most of the time was polar bears.”

- For ENERGY Caribbean’s money, Dr Wright’s greatest achievement is his current activity, constantly travelling to deliver presentations and papers to conferences (he has done at least 103 of these, judging by his curriculum vitae) despite hardly being able to see.

Raymond Wright has been almost totally blind since 2005. “I was giving a presentation at the Ritz Carlton hotel in Montego Bay and the world just went black. I was just not seeing any more.”

This was doubly extraordinary because Wright had been blind in his right eye for 12 years before that, because of a burst vein. Now, his left eye had gone. “The doctors said they had never seen anything like this happening before.”

Astonishingly, for three years after 2005, he continued to travel alone to places with which he had been previously familiar, such as Trinidad and Tobago. More recently, he has been accompanied by his wife, who is a medical doctor in Kingston. In 2010 alone, she has travelled with him to Norway, London (twice), New Orleans, Port of Spain (twice), Panama and Houston.

Wright has also continued churning out books, his latest being *Energy – The New Agenda*, which deals with the world’s need to adopt renewable energy rapidly.

He is currently engaged as lead author for a special report on renewable energy and climate change mitigation for the UN’s Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). His executive assistant, Gina Lee Lawrence, records everything he dictates to her, which in the case of *Energy – The New Agenda* was 250 pages of very technical information. [f](#)