



LORD, I WAS BORN A TRAVELIN' MAN

Familiar website takes you to unfamiliar places

Last week, I scaled the 3,000-foot, sheer granite face of El Capitan in Yosemite, hiked around the base camp at Mount Everest, swam with seals in the kelp forests off the Galapagos Islands, explored the pyramids in Egypt and rode a boat down the Amazon River. I also visited the Taj Mahal, hung out with elephants in Kenya and hiked the Grand Canyon.

I went on all of these adventures without leaving my cubicle or spending a dime.

This week, I'm thinking of visiting the Canadian tundra, touring



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InSites

the Kennedy Space Center and riding a gondola through the canals of Venice.

Anyone who has ever used a computer is aware of Google Maps and Street View. Typically people use these

tools to get directions for a trip they plan to take. Google has teamed up with some intrepid travelers to use these technologies to bring spectacular images of some of the world's most interesting destinations to your screen.

Google Treks, at google.com/maps/about/treks, takes the multi-lensed Street View camera rig to create interactive, panoramic images of places most people will never get to visit. The ability to pan, rotate and zoom the pictures gives viewers a much

richer experience than still photos alone do. The street-level point of view puts you in the locations more vividly than traditional postcard shots can. Videos, text, maps and profiles of some of the explorers enrich the presentations even more.

Of all the destinations I virtually visited, El Capitan in Yosemite National Park, California, was the most vivid experience. Skilled rock climbers hauled the camera rig up the face of the mountain as they scaled it. The result is some truly vertigo-inducing views and some stomach-dropping moments. Climbers lunge for a finger-tip hold or camp on a narrow ledge on the vertical face thousands of feet above the valley floor. Looking up, down and all around the images taken from a perch on the cliff side gives you a real sense of the absurd risk these climbers take.

Given the resources available to Google, it's not surprising that

the quality of the images and videos is excellent. The home page of Google Trek features a grid of ever-changing photos of the various locations profiled. You can change the view to a list of the places, or a world map with pins on them. The user interface of the site will be familiar to anyone who has used Google Maps, which is practically everyone. Visit this site — it's worth the trip.

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