

GO OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Sidetracked website takes you to exotic and often dangerous places

If you had plenty of time and money, and a thirst for travel, where would you go? Would you travel in comfort, flying first class and staying in luxurious hotels, to see the great cities of the world? Perhaps relaxing on a

pristine tropical beach with a frozen drink in your hand would be more your speed. Or would you go to remote areas of the world, where amenities are few and far between and the terrain and climate present real challenges to your very survival?

Sidetracked.com is a site that will take you on virtual journeys to remote and often dangerous places. The site is a collection of essays, accompanied by beautiful photos and video, by travelers risking life and limb to see parts of the world most people never will. Some of them do it to support a cause, and others appear to do it just for the challenge. Their stories and images allow you to join them without taking the risk.

They climb, ski and bike treacherous mountain ranges, spelunk in underground caverns, dive in

frigid waters, put themselves close to dangerous wildlife and tempt fate in numerous other ways. While the site doesn't give biographical information on these intrepid travelers, they appear to be mostly young and financially well off. I make this assumption based on where they travel, the amount of time they spend there and the expensive equipment they require to make their journeys.

Much of the writing reveals a philosophy regarding taking risks that many people would question. One woman writes about a grueling trek across a remote region of Iceland. She laments the wind-driven rain and sleet, the freezing river crossings and the unforgiving terrain that leave her and her companion wondering if they have made a grave error. But then she writes of the crescent moon rising over the otherworldly landscape that will never be seen by most people and claims it was worth it. A man writes about dodging falling rocks as he and his partner climb a natural stone tower in Ethiopia. He also claims that the view from the top that few will ever see is worth the risk. Another woman writes of her journey to the Himalayas to

raise awareness of the plight of Asian elephants. A close encounter with a bull elephant in musth (a

highly aggressive state related to mating), who had already trampled and maimed a man to death, leaves her wondering if she will ever see her husband and kids again. She also claims to be more committed to the cause than ever after the experience.

The stories are inspiring even if your tolerance for risk and discomfort isn't as great as these adventurers. The photos are terrific. My one complaint is that there are no captions with the pictures. They match up with the stories, but more information on individual images would be nice. Some of the stories also have videos. They vary in length from a few minutes to a half hour and longer. I only watched a couple of the shorter ones and a few minutes of some of the longer ones, but they appear to be well done.

The site has a few different sections that organize the stories thematically. There also is a print version of Sidetracked magazine that you can purchase. The Gear section profiles some outdoor equipment companies. If you're looking for good reads on outdoor adventures, this site has you covered.

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