



Wonders exposed

Description

[Google Treks](#) extends Street View to places you can only access on foot. It reveals some remarkable scenery, and takes you to places youâ??ve always wanted to go, such as the Himalayas or the Canadian Arctic. It also reminds me of some important facts about travel.

Behind the camera

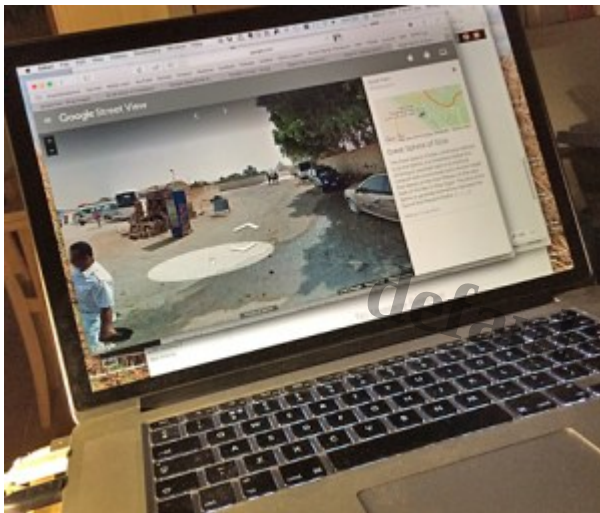
We seasoned tourists tend to blind ourselves to the grunge, and discomfort of getting to the wonders of the world, and of being in a place. We photograph the spectacle, and that lingers in the brochures, books, and shared memories of thousands of visitors. But Google Treksâ?? panoramic imagery inevitably also captures whatâ??s behind the usual vantage point.

It captures the toilet provision, the hawkersâ?? stands, the security escort and the desultory trek from the bus park to the Sphinx at Giza. This is instructive for the would-be visitor, but it also shows in pictorial form that the world is not always as pretty as a picture. Nor are our recollections at 360 degrees. Google Treks reminds me that there are parts of the landscape I normally donâ??t notice, or want to forget, or that otherwise fall short of the idealised recollection.



No photography

The technology reminds us of how wedded we are to photography, brought to light by the fact that in Google Street View you really can't take pictures. For all its photographic fecundity and pretence at immersion the virtual visitor to Giza is discouraged by Google's IP warnings from taking screen snapshots, i.e. photographs of the Sphinx, that you might then want to use to illustrate a blog about travel for example. These days, to be in a place, especially a place of wonder, is to have the freedom to photograph it.



Photographer as alien

The panoramic technology renders the photographer conspicuous in the landscape. Discrete, hand held cameras are ubiquitous and the practice of taking snapshots generally goes unnoticed. For a while, the sight of someone taking a selfie would attract attention. Then selfie sticks were the oddity. It's still a bit strange to see someone trying to take a 360 degree or fisheye picture with their smartphone as they spin and scan in all directions.

But the Google Treks backpack with its alien, above head-height panoramic camera configuration draws attention. You can see people's responses captured in the panoramic imagery. Occasionally you see the shadow or reflection of the photographer in the picture. Google Treks reminds me that the photographer is ever present, and really is part of the picture. The technology renders the picture taker conspicuous again.

•We get the picture•

Google Treks fits within a panoply of all encompassing photographic and scanning technologies. This is the age of the world picture after all as Heidegger characterised it. To get the picture, according to Heidegger, is to put the world before yourself, as if understood and ready to be conceived and grasped as picture (129). The only factor that keeps us from believing we are finally recording the world as it really is, is that the technology keeps changing. So we have to do it all over again.

<https://vimeo.com/124448723>

Note

- The first two pictures were taken during a hasty visit to Giza in December 2006. The third is of Google Street View in the carpark on the way to the Giza pyramids. The video above is another kind of representation of a trek, less panoramic, taken in Cyprus in Easter 2015. I've had it on Vimeo and linked from Facebook since then. The picture below is of a virtual jog somewhere in Costa Rica, via the local gym.



Links

- <http://www.google.com/maps/about/behind-the-scenes/streetview/treks/>
- <http://www.google.com/maps/streetview/>
- <http://www.google.com/maps/streetview/#pyramids-of-giza/great-sphinx-of-giza>

Reference

- Heidegger, Martin. 1977. The age of the world picture. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*: 115-154. New York: Harper and Row.

Category

1. Travel

Tags

1. photography
2. tourism

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