

Polar bears join natural wonders at Google Maps

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Google on Thursday added polar bears to the natural splendor people can glimpse from the comfort of their homes at the Internet giant's free online mapping service.

Members of the Google Maps team joined forces with non-profit group Polar Bears International to venture into tundra in a remote part of Canada's Churchill, Manitoba, late last year for images of the majestic animals waiting for sea ice to freeze.

Polar bears range the tundra in quests for food and mates.

However, even here the Google Maps images only captured a few sightings of the polar bears, whose population is being threatened by warming global temperatures dramatically altering the frigid environment on which they depend.

"There's more to this effort than images of cuddly bears," Polar Bears International executive director Krista Wright said in a message posted at Google's official blog.

"Understanding global warming, and its impact on polar bear populations, requires both global and regional benchmarks."

Along with allowing users of Google Maps to be armchair explorers getting close looks at [polar bears](#) in their natural environment, images and data collected will serve as baseline measures of the effects climate

change is having on the creatures and the area, according to Wright.

Panoramic camera gear—typically used to capture pictures of streets for Google online maps—were mounted on a "tundra buggy" by outfitters at Frontiers North to travel the tough landscape and stay safe from hungry carnivores.

Google's mission to add natural wonders to "Street View" imagery in online maps has included venturing to the Brazilian rain forest and the Galapagos Islands, as well as scaling mountains and diving under the sea.

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