

Next Google Maps adventure: Soaring through Amazon jungle

March 2 2015, by Michael Liedtke



This undated image released by Google on Monday, March 2, 2015 shows the company's Trekker device on a roughly 65-yard zipline above the Amazon jungle in Brazil. The images taken by the Trekker are the latest addition to the diverse collection of photos supplementing Google's widely used digital maps. (AP Photo/Google)

For its next technological trick, Google will show you what it's like to zip

through trees in the Amazon jungle.

The images released Monday are the latest addition to the diverse collection of photos supplementing Google's widely used digital maps. The maps' "Street View" option mostly provides panoramic views of cities and neighborhoods photographed by car-mounted cameras, but Google also has found creative ways to depict exotic locations where there are no roads.

In its latest foray into the wilderness, Google teamed up with environmental protection group Amazonas Sustainable Foundation, or FAS, to explore a remote part of an Amazon rainforest in Brazil. Google Inc. lent FAS its Trekker device, a camera mounted on an apparatus originally designed to be carried like a backpack by hikers walking on trails.

FAS, though, sent the Trekker down a zip line. Google is renowned for going out on a technological limb, but even this project made the company nervous at first, said Karin Tuxen-Bettman, who oversees Google's Street View partnerships.

The setup required FAS workers to tread through the rainforest to find a place where they could string the zip line so the Trekker wouldn't bump into tree trunks and branches as it zoomed through the thick canopy. With the help of some monkeys who joined their scouting expedition, FAS workers found just enough room to erect a zip line for the Trekker's roughly 65-yard trip.



This undated image released by Google on Monday, March 2, 2015 shows a view of treetops shot by the company's Trekker device on a roughly 65-yard zipline above the Amazon jungle in Brazil. The images are the latest addition to the diverse collection of photos supplementing Google's widely used digital maps. (AP Photo/Google)

"One of the things that I love about working at Google is that if a partner comes to us with a crazy idea, we will probably try it," Tuxen-Bettman said.

Since Google developed the Trekker camera in 2012, the device has been dispatched on other unusual journeys. The Trekker went scuba diving in the Galápagos Islands to take underwater photographs of the preserve, and traveled on a dog sled in the Canadian Arctic to photograph the tundra.



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Google's Street View feature has raised privacy concerns through the years because its photographs have occasionally captured images of unsuspecting bystanders engaged in embarrassing activities or near places where they didn't want to be seen. Cars carrying Street View cameras also secretly vacuumed up emails and other personal information transmitted over unsecure Wi-Fi networks from 2007 to 2010, sparking outrage and legal action around the world.

Privacy issues shouldn't be an issue in any of the photography taken by the zip-lining Trekker. Birds and insects are the only visible forms of life in the pictures it took.

More information: Online: www.google.com/maps/views/streetview

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