

Virtual reality could give more people access to outdoors

By Shane Downing, Sierra

As you've probably heard by now, virtual reality technology—or VR—is shaking up industries as disparate as gaming and real estate, filmmaking and journalism, tourism and (no surprise there) pornography. The 360-degree video presentation, which sometimes is also rendered as 3D, has the power to create immersive experiences that seem remarkably real. Now, some media producers and conservation organizations are experimenting with using VR to capture and communicate the experience of outdoor recreation.

Imagine: Someday soon you could scuba dive the Great Barrier Reef, canoe through the Everglades, or hike Half Dome in your bathrobe and slippers, from the comfort of your home.

Those who are experimenting with VR as a conservation tool acknowledge that the visceral experience of being outdoors can't be replicated easily. The intoxicating mountain air, dizzying heights, and sense of adventure of a mountain ascent are one-of-a-kind. "There's nothing that takes the place of actually being outside," says Connie Dassinger, a member of the Centennial Group of the Sierra Club's Georgia Chapter.

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