

## **From our house to the summit of Europe: text by Neal Beggs.**

The film-work 'From our house to the summit of Europe' exists in two forms Side-A and Side-B and is derived from an 'art' walk, of the same name, I made in 2009 by road and mountain path from my home in France close to Nantes to the summit of Mont Blanc, a distance of 762km.

My walk was straight out of the classic Fulton mould and, established by Fulton and Long. As such although my walk was unique and covered new physical ground, it did not with respect to Art cover any new conceptual ground, i.e. it did not expand the frontiers of art. I had simply added another artwork to the already long list of walks made by artists since the 1960s. To emphasize this point we need look no further than Fulton himself, who during the same year as I made my own walk, walked from sea level to the summit of Mount Everest! At the aged of 64! So clearly my walk was nothing exceptional or new.

I was aware of this artistic paradox during the planning stages, and made it a primary and parallel objective of the project to make a second work in addition to the walk itself; one that in a real sense rose to the artistic challenge of attempted to add something new to the discourse on walking. The film, particularly side A, is the result of this endeavor; my attempt at covering new artistic ground. Time will tell if this is truly the case or not.

'Side A' takes a hard-line and pure art approach and gives nothing away. From start to finish the A-Side never deviates from the artistic form set down in the first few minutes of the film. The viewer is given no rest. Each frame descends the screen in continual movement without stopping. First we see

the feet, then the camera moves up to the forward horizon, it then pans left or right, returns to the horizon, and finally descends back to the feet. This action is repeated without fail throughout the film until the viewer finds themselves with their visual concentration exhausted standing on top of a mountain (few will have made it this far). But even on the summit there is no respite, no time to rest and enjoy the view, for once the camera has returned to the feet, the film stops without ceremony and jumps immediately to the credits. We never see the face of the walker or here him speak except to say 'bonjour' twice to passers-by. We do not know why he has made this walk. The only clue is held within the works title "From our house to the summit of Europe'. The film begins at an unidentified location which the viewer can only presume is 'Our house' and ends on the summit of a mountain that likewise the viewer presumes is the summit of Europe. No reason or explanation is given. Side 'A' follows a logic known only to itself, and a rhythm integral to itself and the walker. Each frame like a footstep follows the next in anticipation of a new horizon in perpetual motion toward a goal. It is both addictive and tiring.

Side 'B' is the same as Side 'A' but is contextual including talking to camera and commentary about the walk and work. It is not a 'making-of', but a different mix, in which we see the face and hear the thoughts spoken to camera. The filming structure however remains the same. Side B is more doc-art.

**Some background information on the practical and process issues relating to the walk and the making of the films.**

For reasons of practicality the walk was divided up into nine separate walks, each lasting about three days with nights spent under canvas. At the conclusion of each walk I took a train back home and then later returned by train to the same point to begin the next stage. Except for the final walk to the summit, which I made in the company of my friend, artist and climber Thibaut Espiau, I walked alone and all video was filmed by myself as I walked.

The 762km walk followed roads except for the last 17km that followed a mountain path to the summit. It may seem surprising to describe the ascent of Mont Blanc as a 'path' but in summer it is; all be it a very dangerous, precarious and icy path known as the Goûter route. This path claims several life's each year and I do not recommend it! However, it is possible with planning, acclimatization, equipment and a little luck, for any able bodied person, baring accident, to walk with the occasional use of the hands to the summit. This theoretical fact underwrote the artistic logic of my walk, in that the 'summit' however we interpret this word, is and should be in theory at least, if not in reality, accessible to ALL.

I had no fixed notion about artistic media before starting my walk. The only parameters I set myself were to try and make a work that in some way added to the already expansive discourse on art and walking rather than simply duplicating what had gone before. I figured I would find this 'work' somewhere along the way. In fact before starting my walk I had already abandoned the notion of filming it. It seemed to me to be too vast a subject resulting in too predictable an outcome requiring inevitable and excessive editing. And, I did not own a video camera! But during walk three, I tried some experiments using the video facility on my stills camera. The results

where interesting enough to devote my entire memory card to repeating the process on walk four. And this is how and where the film began, just east of Chateauroux on the D925, during walk number four.

Walks four and five were filmed on a small Lumix still camera with better than expected results. Walks six, seven, eight, and nine are filmed using an HDVideo camera acquired through funding from RoomServes. The A-side is intended as a 'stand-alone' work to be experienced at face value with no other context other than its title. In this sense it is an object, an 'art film'. The viewer presumes that the walk starts from 'our house', a collective abstract term meaning anybodies house or all people's everywhere. Side B is more generous in that it contains all of A with the added extra of talking to camera. It has a strong 'doc-art' feel. Its not a 'making of' film but a different mix, more personal, and easier to locate within a specific time and space.

Both films have their place, and for this reason I chosen to make both available as if they were two sides of the same record. The title also reflects a certain Pop influence in that 'Our house' echo's the lyric "... in the middle of our street. Our house was our castle and our keep" from Madness. It's a bit of pop-trivia. The 'Summit of Europe' refers to 'The European Summit' and as such the title contextualizes the work within a small 'p' political frame. But this is only one frame and it is not the most important. Just like a mountain, the summit is 'not where it's at'.

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