The Earthwalker: Dave Kunst

“Only he who attempts the absurd is capable of achieving the impossible.”
—Miguel de Unamuno

To some people, the idea of walking around the entire Earth might be laughable, if not impossible. But Dave Kunst, inspired by the 1969 moon landing, wanted an adventure of his own, so that’s just what he set out to do.

Dave and his brother John began their 14,450-mile journey in Minnesota on June 20, 1970, traveling eastward on foot through Europe, Asia, and Australia. (They flew over areas where they couldn’t walk, like the Atlantic Ocean.) The brothers set off with just $1,000 and a dependable mule to carry their camping supplies. This adventure was also made possible by Senator Hubert Humphrey, who gave them an official letter of introduction and who contacted embassy officials around the world, asking them to watch out for the walkers.

As they traveled, Dave and John collected money for UNICEF, a charity for children. They also sought out officials in towns where they stayed and asked them to stamp and sign a special scroll. This scroll documented their incredible journey and became tangible evidence that their walk was eligible for the Guinness World Records book. Because of the scroll and their charity work, people felt safe in welcoming Dave and John, which made their journey easier.

Not everything went smoothly on the trip, though. In fact, something truly horrible happened: John was shot and killed by bandits as the brothers crossed through the mountains of Afghanistan. Dave, too, was shot, but survived, and he was determined to continue onward. With his brother Pete as a companion, Dave resumed his walk four months later. More than four years, 20 million steps, and 21 pairs of shoes after he had started, Dave achieved his implausible goal: he became the first person to walk around the world on October 5, 1974. This was a truly memorable event in his life.