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Journey to a New Time

Chapter 1 – A RURAL RIDE

Welcome to my home! It would be my pleasure to describe it to you, and take you on a guided tour of my home, my world, and my life in this 'New Time'.

My house is a simple, single-story cottage sitting discretely in a shallow fold of a steep hillside. Though constructed of 'modern' materials the design and appearance of the cottage are in the old style, with muted colours and a wide old-fashioned verandah along its front.

The cottage is situated on the coast, and the views to left and right along the steep coastline and down to the clear turquoise sea not far below are breathtaking. The beaches and bays are narrow here, for the coastline rises steeply and dramatically out of the sea, its sharply contoured sides covered in the lush greenery of the temperate climate, punctuated by clumps of white frangipani, orange-blossom flowers and scarlet hibiscus. There are new varieties of old horticultural friends and numerous other plants previously unknown on Earth sent as gifts from many different sources including several distant planets.

There is some cloud about today, dark and filled with the promise of rain; but the early morning sun is shining beyond the edge of the cloud, touching the semi-tropical trees with a wonderful silvery glow. A slight breeze sets the palm fronds waving gracefully, and the mildly warm air is heavy with the scents of a hundred flowers.

A translucent white garden table and some matching chairs are set on the terrace in front of the cottage amidst a profusion of plants and flowers, some growing from spaces in the terrace paving, others in large ornamental pots. An inviting breakfast of pastries, colourful fresh fruits and juices is laid out on the table.

At one side of the garden-terrace a crystal-clear rock-pool is fed by a stream; the pool empties over a waterfall, plunging down onto the rocks at one end of the small sandy beach below. A narrow path winds down to the little beach through the semi-tropical greenery.

A little way below the cottage a narrow, though well-made path forms part of the popular Coastal Walk. At times it remains relatively high up, often hugging the cliff-face perilously closely; then it might slope gently down to a secluded sandy beach. Walkers can stop for a picnic by a waterfall, swim in one of the freshwater pools, or relax on the beach in the sun.

There are way-stations along the path provided at a distance estimated to offer a good day's gentle walking – few people walk fast, preferring to enjoy the view, the scents of the flowers and the sounds of the birds. The way-stations are operated in this County by the Ramblers' Association.

The buildings' style and facilities, reflecting the wishes of members, are generally simple and somewhat rustic; but there is a modest room with a private balcony and shower for every guest, and there is always a view and generally a shared terrace or verandah with easy chairs where travelers can relax and meet new friends. The resident caretakers provide maintenance, meals and a warm welcome for their transient visitors, many of whom return regularly.

To the right of the cottage a branch off the coastal path turns inland, winding along a narrow valley whose tumbling stream feeds the pool beside the cottage.

A short way up the valley path a small neighbourhood community accommodates some two hundred people. About half live there permanently, the other half being visitors who come for the change of scene, for walking and sea-bathing, or who stay in the village's beautiful Meditation and Natural Health Centre.

This is a low complex standing just above the village, consisting of a sloping circular building of garden terraces with a partially glassed-in courtyard in the centre where group meetings and lectures take place. Around the circumference of the building, personal accommodation rooms face out over the village towards the sea, while individual lecture and consultation rooms face inland.

This little neighbourhood community is the terminus of a Rural Transit line which meanders through the countryside to the County Town at a fairly leisurely speed. The building which serves as the station is of small scale, yet combines several functions. Food can be eaten in the informal restaurant or taken out for a picnic, a small 'general store' offers a wide variety of goods, and the modest accommodation on the upper levels is used by visitors for stays of anything from a few days to a few weeks, and as an overnight way-station by people walking the coastal path.

This low 2-to-3-storey station complex is located at the edge of the small village, close to the side of the valley. The building itself is in a U-shape, forming three sides of a little paved square laid out with colourful shrubs in terracotta planters and some tables and chairs.

The fourth side of the station square faces the green hillside, but through a glass-like wall in which there are sliding doors precisely corresponding in location to the doors of the transit vehicle which terminates behind it. The glass platform doors are open only when there is a train in the station, a necessary precaution since all transport vehicles run automatically and unmanned.

A train is presently standing in the station awaiting its passengers, its wide doors and those of the glass barrier invitingly open. The vehicle's floor is flat throughout and presents a level entry precisely aligned with the platform. Constructed of a glass-like material, the lower half of the vehicle is light brown in color; the whole upper section is clear, the sides curving up and over in one enormous panoramic window, its treated surface darkening in bright sunlight.

The individual seats are moulded in the same glassy opaque material; they can be rotated in either direction of travel or sideways to face the view and are comfortably upholstered with foam and an oatmeal coloured hessian-weave cloth. The vehicle is articulated in several short sections providing a continuous carriage throughout its length. Since the vehicles operate without drivers there is clear unobstructed visibility to front and rear views through the clear domed end-sections; the front and rear seats are popular with children and with visitors touring the area for the first time.

As a quiet warning sound on the station square announces the train's imminent departure, a few people stroll over and enter the vehicle. Another warning sounds inside the train, the doors close smoothly, and the vehicle starts at once, gliding silently above its guideway, out of the village and along the side of the valley on its reserved, segregated right-of-way.

The vehicle has no physical contact with the track surface, being magnetically levitated just above it by a powerful, permanently magnetic material lining both the trackway and the underside of the vehicle. Propulsion is by electric induction coils set in the trackway and controlled by onboard and central computers.

But the technicalities are quite taken for granted by the passengers who are enjoying the leisurely ride through the countryside, many quite unaware that following their track beneath them is a totally segregated goods transport system enclosed in tunneling, using computer controlled containers which are also magnetically levitated and self-propelled by linear-induction. The containers can be automatically directed at computer-switchable junctions to any part of the County or Region.

The passengers have no need to purchase tickets and will not be troubled by ticket collectors as there is no direct charge levied for each journey. This line is part of the County Transport Network which is paid for by a yearly charge on each resident of the County; this yearly charge also includes public parks, lighting, paving and County amenities in general. Transport is considered an essential part of the 'mechanism' of the County, and to pay directly for each journey by any means whatsoever would be as tedious as having to pay for each step taken on the public paving, or each sniff of a flower in the public parks.

How are standards of service and quality maintained? Is the whole system operated by the County, or are individual lines 'privately' operated?

First it must be said that there are no 'nationalized' services or industries owned and operated directly by central or local government. Legislatures at any level are not permitted to own or operate commercial services of any kind. They see their role strictly as adjudicators of fairness, quality and performance, and to fulfill this responsibility they must remain detached and impartial.

The County Administrations, as distinct from the County Legislatures which make the County bylaws, are responsible for the physical operation of the County infrastructure services; but the County Administrations are likewise reluctant to operate services directly, preferring to place day-to-day running in the hands of professional operating services subject to coordination and service specifications, and followed up by continuous monitoring. In this particular County the whole transit system is under one single management service, with the exception of four contiguous Rural Lines which are operated by a small, and highly efficient local company.

A spirit of pride and pleasure permeates the entire range of production and services in this New Time with an inherent motivation for productivity, efficiency and excellence. Individual participants are proud of their contributions, and always seek to please and to provide the best possible service for their customers and community. But beneath the goodwill, an underlying spirit of realism maintains the organizational forms, the checks and controls necessary to ensure that quality and productivity are always maximized.

Each and every service, large or small, is required to publish an independently audited quarterly assessment of its performance called a TPA, or Total Performance Audit. Performance details vary depending on the service concerned; for the public transport services the list covers everything from mechanical performance and maintenance to cleanliness, frequency of service, timekeeping, response to customer requests, and general user satisfaction.

Needless to say those responsible for transport operation view their own ‘scores’ and those of other Counties (whom in the friendliest possible way they regard as competitors!) with the utmost seriousness. A substantial reduction in any particular score can be as upsetting to a transit manager as the loss of a Michelin star is to a French restaurateur!

Rural Line vehicles are relatively short and being fully automatic can run frequently – generally at about ten-minute intervals throughout the day and evening. During the night when few people travel, vehicles can be called into service automatically from strategically placed underground storage depots simply by sensors noting the passenger’s arrival at the station.

That the vehicle on which we are travelling moves relatively slowly does not appear to worry the passengers. Not that people are vague about time; on the contrary, it is considered disrespectful to the lives and activities of others to keep them waiting for an agreed meeting or an appointment, and people always make a point of being very reliably ‘on time’. But here in the country on the Rural Lines the pace is deliberately relaxed.

The Inter-county lines connecting County Towns with one another and the Regional Capital travel at much higher speeds on elevated transparent tracks or underground when nearing communities, while at the ‘next level up’, the Inter-Regional transport vehicles, rising from tunnels as they leave the Regional Capital precincts, can take off vertically and move silently through the air without friction (by ionization of the surrounding air, thus creating a vacuum in front of the craft) at speeds of 3,000 to 6,000 mph. or more, cutting the longest journey times around the planet to under an hour!

In general however, life in the New Time is less hurried. And anyway, when transport is civilized and the scenery pleasant, travelling can be enjoyed in its own right. The transit vehicles are all equipped with a wide variety of facilities to suit passengers’ needs, and the Rural Lines are no exception. There are fold-down tables for those who want to use them, perhaps to enjoy a snack brought from the station or to work on a personal computer.

A screen is available to each seat which can be activated to show news bulletins, weather reports or a route map with real-time train location indicator. People often leave the map switched on when they are exploring ‘new’ territory as tourists; small speakers in the headrests can be activated to provide a commentary on any points of interest along the route, play music or be programmed to give an audible signal when the train is approaching a desired station.

The individual videophone is particularly useful for walkers and tourists who can call ahead to reserve accommodation at stations or in villages. If their hiking or touring route has been pre-planned they can also send personal baggage unaccompanied via the underground automated goods delivery network – though most people travel light, and all accommodations large and small provide relaxing-ropes, slippers and toilet requisites for their guests.

This route, like all Rural Lines, has been planned to afford the best possible views and ‘countryside experience’ for passengers. At the same time, its segregated right-of-way on a low grass-covered embankment has been carefully moulded into the natural contours so as to minimize visual intrusion.

There are frequent under- or over-passes to ensure easy passage for people and animals across the line.

When approaching villages or towns the transit trackway often descends underground so as not to disrupt life around the community, and the station is located conveniently beneath the community centre. This Rural Line will call at four villages on its way to the County Town, where it terminates and interlinks with the Inter-county.

Villages have often proved to offer the most 'civilized' living environment, being of a friendly size and surrounded by countryside for good air and recreation. Though drawbacks have been the need to commute to the nearest town, for work, shops and entertainment. So many villages have been carefully 'filled-out' with new homes and cottages sympathetically blending with the existing buildings, many often dating back several centuries. In this way limited amenities can economically be provided, though every village is served by regular public transport.

Since people today enjoy country living, and the peripheral areas of many cities have over the years been abandoned and replaced by parkland, some new villages have been constructed. Many new villages, or small towns of say 5,000 inhabitants, are built, taking the form of a ring rather like a grand stadium. The outside surface consists of sloped terraced housing, not more than three or four stories high, slightly irregular with periodic breaks planted with trees. The overall effect is that of a natural hillside covered in greenery. The terraces are always overflowing with flowering bushes, trailing plants and small trees that almost conceal the structure. The sloping terrace gives every home an uninterrupted view, complete privacy, and a small terrace-garden open to the sky.

The central core of the ring is open to the sky, with a traditional village green sheltered by the surrounding terraced housing. On the ground floor of the surrounding ring and facing the central green are various shopping and recreational facilities – a partially covered swimming pool, gymnasiums, indoor ball-game areas – and several cafés with their open terraces, garden tables and sun umbrellas. Areas further back inside the ring devoid of natural light provide space for several small automated manufacturing, agricultural storage and processing plants. The residential apartments are on the levels above these shops facing south, east and west, with workshops for craftspeople and offices for professional services on the less sunny north-facing areas.

As seen from a distance, the 'outside' of the village ring facing the open countryside is visually softened by its irregular terraced slope, planted with a profusion of greenery and flowers. The whole structure blends almost imperceptibly into the countryside, resembling from a distance a low green wooded hill rather than habitation. Indeed the organic blending of buildings with their natural surroundings is a major feature of the new architecture.

While 'natural blending' is one guiding principle of human habitation, another equally important consideration is footprint minimization. The artificial hill, with communal or commercial facilities in its core, ensures the most economical usage of land surface.

Immediately surrounding the villages, areas of agriculture provide specialty crops for which the local soil and conditions may be particularly favourable, as well as mixed market garden cultivation for the village itself, since it is considered very important that everyone should have ready access to the freshest possible produce. Fields of single crops are regularly rotated.

Market gardening is generally cultivated on an ‘intermingled’ basis: different crops of fruits and nuts, flowers for the bees, and medicinal herbs are grown in clusters, often around or underneath fruit trees and nut bushes. This ensures a healthy juxtaposition of different plants and their attendant biological life.

The agricultural machinery used in the countryside around the village is kept within the village’s interior sloping areas underneath the housing, with access to the cultivated areas along small radiating lanes. Various forms of organic plant fertilizer are pumped out to the growing areas from the village processing plants through pipelines embedded beneath the lanes.

The rural train is now winding gradually down into a valley that passes through nut and citrus groves, stopping along the way at villages or fruit picking centres, scenic viewpoints and picnic spots, or access points to rural paths and hiking trails. The passengers’ dress and conversation often reveals their purposes; some are dressed more formally and their talk is of visiting friends. Many are dressed for fruit-picking or walking, and since it is still early in the day they are setting out for their walks, perhaps discussing their plans, then getting off the train at some rural halt.

Though transport is easy and convenient, travel is generally undertaken more for pleasure and recreation than for business. With an automated goods system serving every shop, factory and home no one needs to travel simply as an ‘escort’ for a package or a container! No one carries shopping home: it is packed into returnable box containers, bar coded, and invariably arrives home before the customer! Indeed home screen terminals make it unnecessary to ‘go shopping’ at all, though personal shopping is often combined as part of the general ‘urban experience’ enjoyment of cultural and social facilities.

Nor do people need to commute to the County Town for employment, as each town and village is able to provide virtually all the work opportunities needed for its inhabitants locally. Similarly those whose specialist occupation requires that they work in the towns have no need to commute to the countryside, for each town can provide an ample selection of pleasant accommodation with green views – and clean air! Many people also work from home, such is now the convenience and flexibility of audio and visual communication to which every home is automatically connected for work or pleasure at will.

With an average working day of three hours or less there is now much more leisure time to enjoy, especially through countryside pursuits. Activities such as walking and hiking in turn create a whole new range of pleasant, relaxing and rewarding jobs through the maintenance of walkers’ paths and the hospitable ‘way-stations’ placed along the hiking trails.

Individual passengers can program a ‘personal’ audible or visible warning at each seat to alert them when the train approaches their destination. Now however we hear a public announcement that the train is reaching the end of its journey: the County Town.

But where is the town, the rows of suburban houses, the edge-of-town shopping malls? Front-seat passengers see only a green, pyramid-shaped hill some 300 feet high. Only the glass pyramid glinting in the sun at its top dramatically signals habitation, rather like the tall cathedral spire of a traditional English market town. Architecture today is ‘organic’ in style, blending with trees and plant life so that it always blends into the natural habitat as unobtrusively as possible. This particular pyramid hilltown is home to some 10,000 inhabitants.

Despite its deceptive covering of greenery this gently sloping hill is not a creation of Nature but a complete, self-contained town with surrounding terraced garden homes, containing shops, manufacturing and processing plants and a full range of cultural facilities within its structure. Nor is it a small construction. The 'hill' is half a mile wide at its base and inside the hollow centre is a huge atrium 1200 feet across and full height, lit by natural light through the pyramid glass roof at its apex.

The train dives underground as it did for the villages along its route, but remains in tunnel for a longer distance this time so as not to intrude on the town's views and surrounding park amenities. The 'tunnels' are not dull or boring however, for the natural surface has been cut smooth from the natural rock and finished to a high polish using disintegrating-transmuting rays, then stabilized with a clear diamond-crystal lining which enhances the beauty of the original natural veins and patterns.

The tunnel is softly and evenly illuminated as the vehicle passes through, often with some special geological feature highlighted.

This being a Rural Line which serves to connect the surrounding village communities with the County Town, the train terminates here, gliding silently into one bay of a large circular platform from which five other Rural Lines radiate out into the surrounding countryside serving similar smaller villages, communities and recreational facilities.

Glass elevators in the centre of the platform take passengers either down to the Inter-County lines, or up to the 'town centre', the Atrium Concourse, and the outer residences situated within the slopes of the hill.

Journey to a New Time

Chapter 2 – HOME ON A HILLSIDE

There are still some unobtrusive individual homes 'in the middle of nowhere', some as rental holiday homes around lakes and beauty spots, others as isolated homes in rural areas for the dedicated countrysiders, or for those who seek especial peace and solitude for a particular period or reason. But most people now live in villages, or the more urban-minded on the slopes of an artificial hill-town. This has come about entirely by choice, for the simple reason that the hillside home can provide every resident with three things now considered most important in a residence: privacy, an uninterrupted view, and vertical airspace for a garden terrace.

Privacy is important. The spirit of the New Time is one of cooperation and open-ness; it is normal for strangers to talk together in cafés and public gardens as if they had always known one another, and people often invite to their homes strangers they have met by chance, with whom they find a natural affinity. It may therefore seem something of a contradiction to observe that in their homes most people value their privacy, peace and quiet.

But it is widely understood that ‘you can only give what you already have’, and in the privacy of the home one can develop that inner peace and wisdom which makes for good company and good conversation as opportunities present themselves.

Privacy and peace are assured by the basic layout of homes and access, which places street passageways behind, rather than in front of the individual hillside residences. There are indeed a few outside ‘ring’ walkways where people can take a stroll and enjoy the views, and some residents, often the more elderly, choose to live facing these outer walkways. But the majority enjoy their own unobstructed, totally private terrace and view, with their indoor access ‘street’ behind them. Once inside their homes, residents have complete frontal privacy, with privacy between next-door neighbours on the garden-terraces assured by the planted sloping dividing walls on either side.

The second essential in a home, enjoyed by all hilltown residents, is the unobstructed view from their hillside garden terraces over miles of countryside, with its rolling hills and streams, clumps of woodland, and perhaps just the occasional glimpse of another green hilltown emerging almost imperceptibly from the background scene.

The third essential is vertical airspace. The slopes of the artificial hills provide for every home a terrace garden open to the sky – as opposed to a high-rise apartment balcony which is open only to the front and perhaps the sides, with vertigo-views to the ground below! The generously-sized terraces are warm and sheltered miniature gardens, ideal for relaxing or for meals – most people like to eat ‘out’ on their terrace unless the weather is unsuitable, often plucking fresh fruit from small trees planted in colourful pots.

Since the terraces are sheltered, residents are able to grow plants and flowers that are even more exotic than those in the parks or public gardens. Terraces are generally paved in varied finishes and colours simulating natural stone, with ample space for seating and dining; large terracotta plant pots containing flowers or perhaps small fruiting trees will often be arranged on the paved surface, with more permanent flower beds built-in along the side walls. There is always a low earth-bed at the front of the terrace where people grow small bushes, flowers and trailing greenery. This planting at the front of the terrace provides essential privacy for the levels below.

In this particular pyramid hilltown all of the main dividing walls are set at least 40 feet apart, determining the width of the homes and their terraced gardens. There is nonetheless a choice of size in home and terrace; half the levels have single-floor homes with 30-foot deep terraces and the other half are two-story homes with larger terraces of 60-foot depth.

The single-floor homes usually have a 20-foot wide living room with two 10-foot wide ‘personal rooms’ at the side looking onto the same garden terrace. The two-story homes generally feature a living room and dining area with an adjacent den/workspace at terrace level, plus anywhere between two and four ‘personal rooms’ on the upper level.

At the rear of the home, where there is no natural light other than that piped down through ‘light-tubes’ from the divider wall cavities, sound-insulated rooms offer ample workspace which many people use for constructive hobbies. Since these areas are at the back of the apartment, some people like to have windows looking onto the interior ‘street’.

These are usually craftspeople who undertake work on a limited commercial basis like sculptors, artists, or musical instrument-makers (yes, despite the miracles computers can now create, people still play hand-crafted wind, string and keyboard instruments!). Passers-by can watch the work in progress or perhaps see a small display of the items crafted. Customers who want to buy these more specialized products will not mind making the special journey to the home-workshop; craft products which are more in demand are displayed and sold in the centralized display and shopping areas for customers' greater convenience of access.

The element of privacy within the home itself is much respected, peace and quiet being considered important for personal 'rejuvenation'. It is recognized that everyone needs time for 'self', time to reassemble one's thoughts, to review the day, and of course time for quiet contemplation which now forms an essential part of everyone's daily activities. Although many families live together, often with two three or even three generations sharing one large home, there is still privacy for everyone, and that privacy is always respected.

Every family member has a 'personal room', a sort of miniature apartment, the privacy of which is never invaded, save by explicit invitation. The personal room is in effect a bed-sitting-room, with its own bathroom at the rear plus a small kitchen facility where meals can be prepared as required. The bed is arranged to blend in with the sitting-room furniture as a sofa during the day, to be made up as a bed at night with the bedding stored underneath. At the front of the personal apartment a sitting area might be furnished with a table or desk and reclining chair. In the two-floor homes each personal room will have a small balcony overlooking the family terrace below, and at the rear, its own separate access through a shared rear hall into the interior 'street'.

Quite often individual family members will 'invite' the rest of the family to their personal rooms for a chat or even a meal. Normally however families eat together and spend time together in the larger family rooms – though there is not the presumption that families must always be together for every occasion. Food can be prepared at home; alternatively one can 'call down' to the extensive food preparation services in the large central kitchens for 'autodelivery' of anything from cleaned and prepared fruits to complete dishes ready-to-eat in a variety of different styles.

Whether for individual personal use or family group entertainment, a vast catalogue of documentaries, feature films, and recorded music from the past as well as new compositions, can be selected through the home video terminal; samples can be viewed or heard, and a chosen performance 'streamed' for immediate viewing on the large wall-mounted flat screens in every home (though 'countrysiders' eschew such modern 'intrusions'!)

Musical scores come ready to play with their own settings of instrumentation and tempo. But built-in software in the home unit allows listeners to select their own preferred tempi and add or change the detail of musical phrasing at will, while databanks of different sampled instruments and electronically generated sounds allow listeners to make their own choice of instrumentation. Listening to music in the home can thus become a more creative process; the listener can select any desired instrumentation and 'conduct' the music in the very real sense of defining tempi and phrasing.

Most of the numerous activities taking place in the hilltown's interior theatres and concert halls, performance and lecture rooms can also be accessed in the home through cable.

While a completely private home is generally preferred, there are those who like a little more social contact. Their choice might be a home facing onto one of the two or three Promenades which run around the outside of the Hilltown, so they can ‘potter about’ in their front gardens and exchange greetings with passers-by.

Others might go for an area known locally as ‘The Quarry’. Imagine that a section of the hillside has been removed from one of the corner sloping surfaces of the pyramid – just like a quarry in fact. This forms a little square, the ‘quarry floor’, which is flanked and overlooked by four or five vertical stories of single room apartments with balconies. The quarry apartments are popular with people living alone; some will be youngsters experiencing a new-found independence, others perhaps older people who no longer have a family around them.

The Quarry’s own little square is treated almost like a private club by its surrounding residents. They can peer over their balconies or call down to see if anyone wants a game of chess; the square’s flower beds are tended by a couple of local residents; and the café with its outside tables serves most of the residents as a communal dining/living or clubroom!

Here they chat, check the news, have a meal or a snack. The wide variety of ages makes for lively conversation, and from time to time a ‘stranger’ happens upon this little neighbourhood square and is always made welcome. Indeed it is surprising how many ‘secret’ corners and alleyways there are in these hilltowns, both inside and out. In many of the hilltowns, people who have lived there for years are still making new discoveries!

All hilltown homes are leased at low rates from the Community Corporation which oversaw the planning and construction of the hilltown and which has subsequent responsibility for its maintenance, though the work itself is usually undertaken by specialized firms under competitive contract and strict supervision. The highest standards of cleanliness and general maintenance both inside the hilltown’s public areas and in the surrounding parkland can always be expected.

Overall planning at County and Regional level ensures that there is always an adequate supply of vacant accommodation of all sizes, making it easy for people to move about, especially as furnishings tend to be simple and much is built-in. Some people move quite frequently simply for a change of scene, while others elect to stay put in ‘their’ community all their lives! Another motive for moving home reflects changing needs as families grow larger, then smaller; though once again tastes vary, and some families keep their larger home, opening it to holiday visitors or ‘paying guests’ when the children leave the nest.

There is enormous variety in the types and sizes of home available, even within what might be imagined as the constraints of the artificial hill. The ‘hills’ vary too. There are formal cones and pyramids, though these are usually nearer the county centres. In the remoter country areas people prefer more ‘organic’ architecture and here the artificial hills are varied in shape, contoured to fit the topography, curved around a corner of a lake, or perhaps ‘grafted’ onto the side of an existing hill. All of these artificial hills are amply covered with greenery and flowers.

One interesting exception to the ‘greenery rule’ is a hilltown built into an existing hill overlooking the sea in an area where the rocky landscape provides little vegetation. This hilltown’s sides are covered by a haphazard-looking jumble of houses of different sizes and shapes, interspersed with terraces, squares and little winding paths, the whole coloured white in the style of an old Greek island village.

Solid front doors leading into homes or private courtyards are in simple blues and greens, and citrus trees with their seasonal perfumed flowers followed by oranges and lemons abound in both private courtyards and the little public squares.

People have put out pots of flowers on their balconies, and outside their homes in the narrow winding paths and streets. In many of the public squares small cafés serve food and drink at rustic tables under trailing vines. At its lower end where the village meets the sea, a small harbour provides a home for rental pleasure boats, while small craft shops and cafés with their tables under sun umbrellas line the quayside. The town attracts quite a few visitors!

Privacy, a view, and vertical airspace: these are the requirements of a perfect home, features offered by virtually every one of the hillside apartments. But in addition to the requirements for the home itself, humans also have a social side: we need contact with others for work, trade, culture, entertainment, and simple conversation. And if these facilities are to be of any practical use they must be closely and conveniently to hand: a few moments' walk or ride away, not half-an-hour's stop-go drive through polluted air on a crowded road with parking problems at the end of it! Here again the hilltown scores on pure convenience, with all its commercial, professional, and recreational facilities concentrated right there in the hillside's interior core.

Indeed with such a wealth of attractive facilities so readily available, less time is now spent in the home itself, mainly because there is so much going on around it. The numerous facilities inside the hilltown in and around the central atrium, the roof top promenade areas and the beckoning countryside provide plenty of incentive to be 'out and about'.

Though many people enjoy going out into the surrounding countryside with its numerous market gardens and fruit and nut groves to pick their own fresh produce, much is also communally picked for restaurant facilities and shops, and this is processed in the large and well equipped kitchens looking out over parkland at the base of the pyramid where prepared dishes are made for home or restaurant use.

With the varied yet generally milder, more equable climate of the New Time, combined with the increased leisure time at people's disposal and their great love of healthy pursuits, fresh air and the outdoors, it is hardly surprising that the residents enjoy and consider as equally important the facilities existing outside and around their Hilltown. Indeed as much attention is given to the outdoor surroundings as to the design of the town itself, and the immediate countryside offers a thoughtfully planned selection of facilities.

Access to the 'great outdoors' could not be simpler for the Hilltown residents. Periodic breaks in the housing units allow for public top-to-bottom walkways winding through treed and landscaped slopes. Or for quicker access the internal sloping elevators terminate at the base of the Hilltown permitting direct walk-out into the surrounding parkland. By its very nature and concept, this is a very compact town; there is no suburban sprawl gradually eating its way across those 'greenfield sites' so much beloved of developers in the old days! This and similar present-day towns resemble the old fortified towns of medieval times: town on one side of the city wall, open country on the other!

The extensive park area immediately surrounding the Hilltown is laid out semi-formally for quiet relaxation, and people can be seen strolling along the paths enjoying the trees, the green grass and profusion of colourful scented flowers.

Although the air is now good everywhere, whether in buildings or outside, here in the park it is especially relaxing; for this the townsfolk can thank the many different species of pine trees which are known to give off beneficial emanations. On each side of the smooth paths moulded from a glasslike material resembling cream-coloured marble, the emerald-green grass is dotted with patches of tiny blue and purple flowers no bigger than the blades of grass.

The colours of all the flowers are brilliant in their depth and intensity, and the scent is everywhere, sometimes almost overpowering, particularly when the sun is shining again after a rain shower.

In one area several rows of chairs are grouped in front of an old-style Victorian bandstand screened by trees at its rear. An announcement states that a local youth orchestra will perform 'for your pleasure' during the afternoon.

There are many small pavilions and open music auditoriums scattered around this extensive urban park, some circular and surmounted by crystal domes, others in the shape of small transparent pyramids or in the style of simple classical Greek structures, none higher than the surrounding trees, each one different, yet all in their own way blending into and enhancing the park. Quite a few are covered by rich greenery and flowers trailing from their terraces. Some of these buildings are cafés, sport facilities or garden and plant centres.

At its outer edges the semi-cultivated and formally planned Town Park gives way to wedges of informal parkland alternating with market-gardening agriculture or fruit and nut groves. Although the market gardens are supervised and tended by professional farmers, most of the produce is self-picked by the town's residents themselves, who enjoy the experience of being amongst the plant life; they also take the opportunity, now considered important, to thank the plants for their generous gifts. This appreciation is carried through to the careful preparation of food and the tradition of eating slowly, consciously savouring the raw materials and their preparation.

The expression of gratitude to the Universe is a frequent theme in the New Time – and relaxed appreciation of one's food also makes for better digestion!

There is quite a choice of footpaths leading off into the 'real' countryside, each one having a small signpost showing its destination, distance and walking time; some of the paths are designed as circular routes, again with walking times given for the circuit.

Walking is a favourite leisure activity, particularly as there is so much beautiful countryside to enjoy and ample leisure time to enjoy it, while the less dense, higher-vibration etheric lightness of being causes less fatigue over long distances. A popular outing is to walk to the next village or scenic spot, perhaps enjoy some light refreshment then return home by one of the Rural Lines that fan out from the hilltown.

Passengers reaching the County Town on the Rural Lines arrive under the central atrium at a terminal bay, one of several grouped in a circle, with glass elevators in the centre of the platform. Those passengers who plan to travel to another County Town or to the Regional Capital take the elevator down to a lower, square-layout platform where they can join the Inter-county grid, while taking the elevator up brings arriving passengers directly to the County Town's central atrium.

The Atrium itself, with sunlight streaming in from its glass pyramid 300 feet above, is a huge tropical paradise of exotic plants and trees vibrant with life, their leaves shimmering with the excitement of the activity around them. The odd monkey or colourful bird can often be seen peering through the foliage – they are not 'captive' but here of their own free will. They tend to enjoy their interaction with humans and generally stay for long periods, often for life, though they are free to return to their previous habitat at any time they choose to do so.

This is the place to see and be seen, to enjoy the ever-changing parade of people, to make new friends or meet old ones, to read or relax, enjoy some light refreshment, work on a laptop, or play some table game with anyone who's interested.

One can take a leisurely stroll around the perimeter, pausing to watch the passing scene in one of the many sidewalk cafés or benches set in alcoves among flowering bushes. The beautifully tiled floors and surfaces, alcoves with small sitting areas surrounded by scented flowering bushes and the many small ornamental fountains recall some ancient Moorish palace.

This is the hub of community life. The numerous small cafés and meeting areas are used as they were in the traditional coffee houses of central European and eastern capitals – places to sit for as long as you feel inclined, places to work, to read, to meet friends old and new, to play chess... the list is endless.

Tropical greenery and flowers abound, apparently thriving in the warm and slightly humid climate which is carefully monitored and controlled to resemble as nearly as possible what the technicians fancifully, though quite seriously refer to as "nature's own sweet breath"!

Around the Atrium periphery are numerous attractive counters dispensing a great variety of pastry and baked goods, fruit, fresh fruit juices and hot drinks, which people collect on trays then take over to one of the eating areas where elegant white tables and chairs are set under palm, mango and other tropical trees, perhaps grouped around a turquoise-tiled pool with its own small fountain.

Along the ground and second level galleries surrounding the concourse are the shopping areas, each area specializing in the sale of different categories of goods such as food, clothing and household articles. The shops are thoughtfully and attractively laid out as pleasing display areas, showing off demonstration items of the complete range of goods available in settings similar to those in which they will be used. Customers can test equipment and appliances, try on garments, and make their selections.

Their chosen items are then ordered by programming a hand held computer note-pad and passing a personal credit card over its surface which enters their name, address and account code. The goods are then immediately dispatched to the customer's home from automated warehouses deep in the pyramid's internal industrial areas by automated goods delivery, the cost being directly debited from the customer's personal bank account.

The warehouse computer, like those in other towns and cities, is in direct contact with the computers of supplier factories, so the factories are continuously informed as to sales movements. Providing that there are no design changes and that the product remains current, re-orders can be scheduled automatically.

There are 'supermarkets' for basic bulk-food requirements. These do not offer the bewildering range of competing highly-packaged 'brands' which were once a feature of the supermarket shelves in the 'old days'. Packaging is considered a waste of resources, and high standards of quality and productivity make competition between similar products almost irrelevant. Much use is made of bulk food dispensers and returnable containers; household needs from cleaning materials to dry or preserved food products such as nuts and grains are selected from rows of automated dispensers.

A shopper wanting some flour for home-baking will select the bin containing the chosen grains, program an indicator panel, and the grain will be ground to individual requirements in the quantity desired. The finished product is then dispensed into a small returnable container which is automatically labeled and coded with contents, ingredients, weight and price. When all the desired goods have been selected the customer passes a credit card and the coded packages over a scanner, then places the purchases into a container which is coded for immediate, automated home delivery.

Fresh fruit can be picked or collected personally in the surrounding market gardens; but for convenience many prefer to make a selection from the varied and colourful market stands gathered together along one side of the atrium concourse, where fresh produce is brought in from the town's agricultural areas several times each day for maximum freshness.

In the higher galleries overlooking the central atrium are the cultural areas and facilities: concert halls, theatres, and many meeting rooms large and small. Performances in the various theatres and activity spaces vary considerably, from old style operas to contemporary works; for something quite different there are dramas brought from other worlds in which the emotions involved in the action are communicated directly to the audience telepathically.

Most productions are 'recordings' projected in multi-dimensional form. Others may feature live human performances by local amateurs which can be combined with multi-dimensional background scenes recorded anywhere in the world or in other worlds, the audience totally enveloped with realistic surround sound and vision. Some productions however, are entirely 'live', largely because people have found they still enjoy 'acting' as an aspect of creation. This provides an outlet for local amateur talent, very popular with participants and audiences alike.

Professionalism in performance is important, but equally important is that both performers and audience should enjoy the show.

Many people prefer to enjoy music in their homes; but there is always a wide selection of musical concerts, some 'live', involving local amateurs or pre-recorded featuring full surround-sound accompanied by a visual display of instruments, natural scenes, or complex interplays of light. Again the musical offerings are numerous in their variety, from medieval to contemporary.

Music in this New Time expresses the belief that music, like life itself, should reflect the 'trinity' of intellect, emotion and inspiration; thus it reflects more closely the baroque music of the 18th century, with its fugues and variations. Indeed the original baroque composers are much respected and their works when performed are particularly popular.

The music completely surrounds and envelops its listeners, but does not deafen them; it is never aggressive either in volume or in content.

The act of musical performance is also enjoyed in its own right, and in the many smaller rooms and performance spaces music students can invite a few friends or the public to a short performance. Or perhaps someone will be reading poetry, others might be giving talks... there is always something going on and the variety is almost endless. Any event can be experienced either in the central theatres where they are taking place, or accessed live from people's homes relayed onto their video screens.

High above the Atrium Concourse where the glass pyramid-shaped roof-dome meets the main hill structure, the roof-top 'Sky Walk' runs right around the 600-foot baseline of the glass dome, both on the inside and the outside, thus offering magnificent views out across the surrounding countryside or down upon the lively scene of the Atrium below. These lofty heights are reached by several vertical elevators of totally transparent construction, their stately progress as they gently rise and fall giving an added dimension of movement in the interior concourse. At night the elevator cars are glitteringly illuminated, as also is the pyramid glass roof.

The internal base areas beneath the Atrium which are devoid of daylight are occupied by the various support services: waste reprocessing, water heating, air pumping and extraction machinery. Most manufacturing processes are fully automated, products being made to order through a 3D printing process which creates complex solid objects from computerized patterns. This equipment also occupies the non-daylighted areas. The operators who control and monitor the machines work remotely from stations overlooking the central Atrium, enjoying the natural daylight which filters down from the glass pyramid dome light, or from control rooms on the town's exterior north face.

All service and production areas are open to public viewing. Where automated machinery is in operation special transparent viewing passages and galleries are provided. Most people like to understand and appreciate the 'behind-the-scenes' operations of their town, and throughout the production, processing and warehouse areas people of all ages can be found viewing everything from effluent purification to maintenance of the transit vehicles. Explanatory commentaries are always provided, with a personal chat for anyone who shows a particular interest.

A totally segregated internal goods transport system known as the 'autodelivery' serves the entire hilltown through its own network of small-bore tunnels and lifts. The system uses 4-foot wide by 3-foot high containers propelled by linear-induction coils and supported by magnetic levitation. Destinations are bar-coded and containers are routed automatically through computer-controlled junctions for direct delivery to homes, shops, warehouses and production areas.

It is worth noting here that the overall maintenance cost of this hilltown community is only a fraction of the old-style equivalent. Consider the miles of paved roads requiring upkeep, the underground water pipes and drains which frequently needed digging up, plus the other services such as gas, electricity and internet cables. All such services are compact, enclosed, and fully accessible with minimum time and expense, making breakdowns and interruptions virtually non-existent.

Also, as the initial construction of these hilltowns and cities is written-off, the rents go down, with residents and businesses paying only for upkeep and maintenance, which despite the highest possible standards, places a comparatively small financial burden on homes and business.

When land was bought and sold as an 'investment' and a town or city grew in attraction and population, landowners were able to ask higher and ever higher prices and rents, so the fate of the city was already sealed. As prices had moved up in the old European cities, the familiar meeting places, the cafés where people had been congregating, chatting, and reading the papers for centuries gradually became more expensive and many were forced out of business. In America, escalating urban rents set in motion the infamous 'flight to the suburbs', to the cheaper greenfield sites, and thus many city centres gradually died while their outer growth sprawled.

Thanks to greatly reduced living and business costs, and to increased efficiencies through constant research, development and productivity-increases, few people work more than about three to four hours a day. Production and service work is generally organized in multiple shifts throughout the day to provide an overall 12- to 15-hour service period. With so much of the day freed there is plenty of spare time to enjoy and experience the town's great variety of cultural, recreational and learning facilities; this in turn creates an almost unlimited demand for new facilities and new ideas.

A real-time 'notice board' in the form of a central databank details the enormous variety of events and activities on offer together with their times and locations. This service can be accessed from screens throughout the city and surrounding communities, as well as from the personal *communicators* which most people carry with them. It is equally simple, via voice activation or keyboard, to reserve a meeting or performance space and enter the details of what you are offering.

The reservation and use of space may seem casual but there are more than enough spaces of all kinds and sizes to suit every need, and users are very conscientious. No one would consider announcing an event without presenting it, and spaces are always left tidy, ready for the next user.

The built environment here in this County Town has been carefully planned and constructed to be varied and exciting, while providing numerous formal and informal spaces for events and activities as well as occasions for the chance encounters which people so much enjoy.

In many of the interior and exterior areas of the central core of this city many varieties of space and mood have been recreated. There are small stone-paved squares surrounded by lush greenery and intimate corners hidden away, 'secret' courtyards at the end of narrow passageways, and some special secluded areas with a sign of two hands placed palms together indicating that they

are set aside for quiet meditation. In contrast, several wide, imposing avenues run around the exterior of the sloping hillside at different heights for summer strolling.

Though people dress for simplicity and comfort, their clothing is always colour-coordinated and chosen with care. Everyone manages to look effortlessly immaculate, with clothes fresh and clean, hair shiny and skin healthy. The atmosphere is definitely casual, yet there is an air of sophistication and worldliness among these relaxed, confident and smiling crowds. And there is a quiet, unaggressive, unobtrusive self-pride which makes people want to look their best.

The sense of activity, of things to do, and the ever-present challenge of exploration is almost overwhelming in this, the County's focal point, rather like the great 'World Fairs'. The floor of this enormous concourse, and its surrounding galleries, offer a never-ending array of travelling exhibitions mounted year round as well as the numerous permanent exhibitions, such as those at the huge Art & Craft Centre where all the best and most creative individual craftwork is displayed. There are working demonstrations of many types of crafts, together with their wonderfully individual products each so carefully made and finished, reflecting the enormous variety of creative artisan talent which has blossomed with the increased leisure time now available.

There are also within the County City's envelope, many Science and Art Museums, Concert Halls and theatres of all sizes and shapes, extensive Halls of Learning and a vast Central County Library filled with books from all periods of history and a great data bank of video and music recordings.

Back in the central atrium a cheerful, colourfully dressed gentleman behind a pastry counter set up outside one of the busy cafés tips his yellow top hat to the passers-by, offering free samples and an almost unending stream of humorous quips and stories. "This is the Hub of the Universe ladies and gentlemen" he announces. And no one in the smiling crowd would dream of disagreeing with him.

There is leisure time in abundance in this New Time, and innumerable ways of spending it enjoyably. But learning and self-improvement is also considered highly important, and people of all ages have an insatiable appetite for knowledge! Every community large and small provides a facility known as the ‘Halls of Learning’, where young and old can study either full- or part-time anything and everything from history and philosophy to specific skills or crafts. Learning may provide skills for a chosen occupation or profession, or simply an expansion of one’s general knowledge and understanding.

Though personal teaching and apprenticeships are available, learning generally takes place through interactive computers or multi-dimensional imaging. This has the advantage of allowing individuals to take their own personal ‘exploration path’, developing their own talents, skills and interests at their own pace.

In the case of very young children however, education is still a very ‘human’ process. Young children come together in supervised groups much as they did in the old days. Grouping helps children to interact with one another, providing an important foundation and guidance for their future growth and development. They are taught to be aware of their own bodies, minds and spirits, to value them and to treat them with respect. They are taught how the body functions, and they are shown the effects of maltreatment, the dis-eases and illnesses which can be caused by wrong thinking or wrong action. Here the Law of Karma guides education: the object is to show children the direct results of actions in terms of their effects, so that the children themselves can make the right choices without parental pressure.

Young children are also taught politeness and consideration for others; any occasional sign of rude or aggressive behavior towards other children is immediately discouraged in open discussion. One of the first, if not *the* first lesson for any child is to respect others, to recognize and neutralize any sense of aggression. Children are taught to respect one another, and indeed to serve one another through the performance of school duties.

There are no ‘staff’ to serve food or clean the premises; even very young children look after their own learning and recreation areas, sweeping and cleaning every day, helping with the preparation of food under professional guidance then serving it to their colleagues and clearing up afterwards. They are taught to take a pride in service and to do it willingly and caringly; and they are taught to take a pride in their surroundings, to treat their learning facilities with respect, and always to ‘leave wherever you have been better for your passing’.

Intimate inter-action between young children and the more elderly folks is a feature of everyday life and education, to the clear advantage and enjoyment of both sides!

Younger children are also encouraged to communicate with and to respect the natural environment by the simple expedient of enjoying it as much as possible, and ‘field trips’ or outings are organized frequently.

It is quite common to see a party of young schoolchildren leaving a rural transit station and setting off down one of the country paths accompanied by several adults – who always look as if they are there for the fun as much as for any ‘supervisory’ duties. The children too look happy and relaxed, yet they are always well-behaved, with one or two younger ones walking in pairs holding hands. Children often come out in school parties to help with the fruit picking, working on the lower branches of the trees and bushes, always very serious about their work whatever their ages. They are never under pressure to work as an imposition; their parents and teachers try to communicate to the children the duty and the joy of making a contribution to their community.

Later on, when they have picked several boxes of fruit which is then dispatched directly to the town Fruit Centre, the children gather at one of the pavilions in the fruit groves to be rewarded with some refreshing fruit juices accompanied perhaps, by a short talk on some aspect of agriculture.

After the children’s rest and refreshment one of the teachers might talk about the fruit and nuts which form the main diet in the New Age, explaining that the fruit is freely ‘given’ by the plant to anyone who passes by. “Why?” the teacher asks the children. “So that the plant can spread its seeds” one of the children answers. “Yes, well done”, replies the teacher. “The seeds are surrounded by tasty, tempting, nutritious fruit and the plant, which itself is not mobile, invites animals, humans or birds who *are* moving around to take and enjoy the fruit as a reward for spreading the seeds. Nuts also are *given* by the plant or tree in the sense that we do not kill the plant when we take and eat nuts; the same applies to grains. But when we eat roots or leaves we are taking a part of the plant’s body, something which we do very rarely and generally only for medicinal purposes”.

Food is grown organically in small irregular plots, fruit bushes and trees inter-mixed with flowers for the bees, and fertilized by natural humus derived from plants at the end of their life cycle. The trees, bushes and plants are lovingly – yes, lovingly! – tended and cared for, and the resultant fruit is healthful and bursting with flavour. There are many more varieties than in the previous period on Earth.

Meals are always prepared freshly, in the form of various uncooked savoury and sweet fruit salads – perhaps accompanied by baked pastries and breads.

On another outing children might be taken to an Animals’ Home where they can meet horses, donkeys, goats and other semi-domesticated animals. Some of these animals will have come in from the surrounding wilderness areas to seek human care when they have been injured, while others simply come and stay for a while because they enjoy the contact with humans! There is never any compulsion for them to remain.

In this New Time humans are able to communicate with animals on a telepathic level. Certainly there is no fear on the part of animals, and no exploitation of any kind by humans – though animals and humans do occasionally work together by common consent. Horses and mules will readily volunteer their services to carry humans and their camping equipment into wilderness areas either for recreation or for environmental work, a collaborative experience enjoyed by humans and animals alike.

Needless to say, the ‘factory-farming’ and the killing of animals, birds and fishes is no longer even contemplated, with a resultant spirit of mutual friendship and respect between all life-forms. Nonetheless, people remain aware of their past human history, and remind themselves of it frequently on the principle that ‘mistakes remembered will not be repeated’. So the children communing with the animals as children like to do, will be told about man’s past relationship with the animal kingdom. But the story will be told briefly and in a somewhat ‘sanitized’ version, since it would now be considered somewhat brutal, even frightening for the very young.

That Man was once responsible for the annual killing of millions of cattle, chickens, fishes and other creatures is something which people both young and old now find too horrific to contemplate, and pictorial records of the breeding conditions and mass slaughter of animals as once practiced are rarely shown for this reason. Worse still was the killing of animals and birds for so-called ‘sport’, a form of ‘amusement’ which children would probably no longer comprehend.

For humans have regained that wonderful bond of trust and friendship between all living creatures. As the children’s teacher summarizes: “Mutual love between all our fellow beings throughout the entire range of Creation is something of great value to us all and to our universe. We must seek to develop and extend it, never letting it deteriorate again.”

One very fundamental principle guiding the upbringing of children is the Law of Karma. Children are never told to “do this” or “do that” without any reason being given; rather, they are encouraged to review the different courses of action open to them together with the anticipated consequences, then make their own informed decision. And when they do take a course of action, be it good or bad, wherever possible they will be allowed to experience its consequences which will be clearly and patiently pointed out to them.

Children are taught that when they are young they take from their parents in the form of physical support; while it is always made clear that this is freely and lovingly given, at the same time children are expected to do their share in the home, for it is considered wrong that they should be encouraged to take what they are given without appreciation. They are held responsible for their own individual and personal upkeep and the cleanliness of their rooms; they are told how they should conduct themselves, and if they do not, then any unfortunate effects are solely theirs to be experienced.

For example, a boy may not keep his room tidy. The parents would not scold or order a tidying up session, but rather they would drop hints that “we never visit young Jimmy in his room – it’s such a disaster”. Since everyone has their own ‘personal room’ in the family home and it is the custom to ‘invite’ one’s family members to ‘visit’, there is a natural discipline upon children to keep their own rooms clean and inviting. For outings outside the home, children are automatically invited anywhere adults go; if they misbehave they don’t get invited anymore. They soon realize why, and will generally apologize and mend their ways. They are treated as adults, but they are also expected to act the part.

In the past bored children were often responsible for community vandalism; now it is quite common to see groups of schoolchildren working in the public gardens, or helping with fruit harvests. They are taken around their communities and shown the detailed technicalities of how everything works, from public transit to communications systems, so that they will respect these facilities and treat them properly.

They visit maintenance depots where they are shown working models and the current work-in-progress, and are frequently permitted to help under supervision. In such ways they are taught to identify with, and participate in the running of their community.

Children are also encouraged as early as possible to participate in County and Regional planning and legislative proceedings. There are several student societies for group participation in legislative affairs; and in all legislative and planning proceedings at any level the Constitution requires open access for all – with no age limit!

As children grow older, their education process grows with them, giving wider and wider latitude for individual choice and self-expression while at the same time subtly demanding a greater sense of social responsibility and participation in the community. Young people are encouraged to take part-time jobs after school at an early age; even simple jobs teach self-discipline, time-keeping and how to treat customers with care and respect. And the act of working, of contributing to society and earning some pocket money further enhances the child's sense of self-worth and independence.

While schooling for younger children is paid for by the parents, at the age of fourteen youngsters take out their own loans in the form of Education Credit Units. It is considered important that young people see education for what it really is: an investment in themselves and their own future. It is also important for them to learn the power and the responsibility of purchasing, of exercising choice and judgment with their own Credit Units. It is they themselves who choose the education program, the teachers and the level of equipment they wish to work with.

Thus higher-level education is always a reflection of what each generation of students wants to learn, and how they want to learn it. They are given expert advice on future trends so that they will know what skills are coming into demand; and expert analysts are available who can interview students on an individual basis and establish what occupation would be most suited to each student's personal temperament.

But the decisions are the students' to make – and indeed to revise as often as they wish, for the education system allows as much flexibility as each student needs.

Many teenagers feel the need to get away from the family, see the world, and find their own feet. This is accepted quite naturally; indeed it is considered important that young people should learn both the joys and responsibilities of independence in their early years. And there are no longer the dangers which many parents once feared for their children. There is plenty of opportunity for work anywhere on the planet the newly independent teenager may choose to go and no shortage of pleasant accommodation for rent – one-room studios in the towns and city centres being the preference among students and young job-seekers.

The Halls of Learning provide a wide and constantly expanding selection of facilities for more advanced study of everything from specialized skills, advanced meditation and mind-control, to historical or philosophical subjects, as well as higher levels of expertise in various creative manual crafts or musicianship. These facilities are used by people of all ages, and it is quite common to see eight, eighteen and eighty-year-olds sitting side by side without any sense of incongruity. Indeed the free intermingling of age groups adds a further depth of outlook and experience during any relevant group discussions. All forms of study are enjoyed, to the extent that learning, living and leisure have become quite inseparable.

The abundance of leisure time is due in no small part to the high level of productivity, thanks to which all the necessary goods and services are provided in abundance, to high standards of quality, and at progressively reducing cost. This results in part from the pervading spirit of goodwill, cooperation, dedication to service and fair trading. But the underlying economic systems make their own significant contribution to material prosperity, to the relaxed business climate, and to the continuous striving for excellence.

In 'days of old' the whole subject of *economic planning* proved a continuing source of contention. On the one hand, if it made sense to organize workers in a business so that everyone was effectively employed, then this principle should logically apply to the economy as a whole. But 'planning' could so easily become heavy-handed, as the Socialist Bloc countries during the latter half of the 1900s clearly illustrated. It has now been found possible to provide overall coordination and full employment of the economy, while not conflicting with the creativity and initiative of individual enterprises.

Economic activity is continuously reviewed through Community Planning Councils in villages and towns, then coordinated up to County and Regional level. These Community Planning Councils are not government institutions.

They are groups of interested people: representatives from service or production companies, educators, community administrators, people with new ideas, consumers who want a new product or service. Some attend meetings regularly, others may come occasionally to raise some specific point. It is in these meetings that people discuss new products or services that may be needed, new ideas which can be tried, new services for the town, improvements which can be made, or perhaps products or services which are running down so that new employment opportunities must be sought and developed. Advisors can also be called in when required from one of several non-government Employment Monitoring or Commercial Development Services.

Local initiative ensures that local needs are provided and that local people are employed; coordination through upper levels ensures that there is collaboration where necessary. For example, if a local community decides to promote tourism for some scenic natural attraction, then transport, accommodation and advertising can be coordinated with neighbouring communities and at County level. Coordination also provides an order of priorities where labour or capital is scarce, so that resources can be apportioned productively.

A local Community Planning Council meets regularly in the County Town whose atrium and terraced apartments we have recently explored.

In the most recent debate a representative of management from a local manufacturing plant discussed new trends in electronics which must be incorporated into their design and production processes; this in turn would require that a new training program be developed for local education. A speaker from the local Hotel Management Group advised that tourism in the area is increasing, requiring more overnight accommodation and some additional walking paths, developed in conjunction with existing transit lines.

Another item debated concerned a local industry which is running down because its major product has been outdated by new technological developments; what can be done to replace the potential loss of employment? An advisor from one of the Economic Monitoring Services suggests that contact be made with a firm in another part of the County which has ideas for expansion but lacks available workers due to full employment.

In these meetings, the Performance Audits of local infrastructure services are also reviewed. A senior member of the 'Blue Line' Transit Management Team, a small group which operates four Rural Lines in coordination with the overall County Administration, has been invited in so that her Team may be congratulated on producing the best Performance Audit in the Region for the fourth consecutive quarter.

Thus business and the community together establish an on-going plan of action and priorities. Community Planning Council decisions are also used as guidelines for the investment of 'public credit', a term which may require brief explanation.

A credit facility or system of accounting (what used to be called 'money'!) still remains an economic necessity for maintaining a record of the amount of creative energy or labour each individual has either contributed or taken from the community effort. It also serves the traditional purposes of facilitating trade in goods and services, as well as facilitating saving and investment. Without some kind of a credit system trade would revert to barter, while saving, and thus also investment, would be seriously impeded.

But credit-creation is now regarded for what it really is: a privilege and a responsibility conferred upon the banking system by the general consent of the community at large, a Community Resource which should therefore be directed in the broad interests of the Community.

Indeed historians looking back to the early days of the twenty-first century find it difficult to believe that an entire nation's financial and monetary system was openly treated by the major banking institutions as 'pocket money' to be used for gambling, placing leveraged bets on wild and highly risky devices the complexity of which often challenged the best financial minds.

Thankfully the Banking System is now viewed as a part – an essential part – of the nation's infrastructure, and thus required to direct credit in ways which will ensure the continuing development and productivity of the economy, and provide the facilities necessary to enjoy its resultant prosperity. This requirement and approach produce a much closer cooperation between bank and business in the best interests of both parties and the economy as a whole.

Individual Banks will call upon independent experts to assess all new business loan applications. New businesses will be assisted where necessary to ensure that their projects, pre-planning and projections are viable; regular subsequent monitoring ensures that the business performs according to its projections so that remedial action can be taken promptly when necessary.

An important feature of business loans is that the total project, from design through production and management to sales, becomes the loan collateral, rather than the personal assets of individuals. Hence the need for extensive pre-loan research and subsequent monitoring. Thus creative collaboration ensures that each new business is securely established and runs according

to projections; bankruptcies are wasteful, disrupting, and are not considered an acceptable option.

Banks also direct credit according to an order of priorities for which the Banking Sector relies on the Community Planning Councils. The 'interest rate' charged to borrowers remains unchanged at a low rate which reflects only the cost of administering the credit loan.

The Central Bank of each Region is responsible for regulating the overall quantity of credit circulating through the regional economy. More specifically, it is required to maximize credit availability within the productive capacity of the economy, or in other words, to ensure *full employment*. For everyone wants and expects to contribute and develop their creative talents in a rewarding job of work; if just one single person was unable to do so it would be considered degrading, a waste of talent – and a reflection of unacceptably poor economic management!

Full employment was always considered impossible to achieve since economic expansion reached anywhere near full employment it was inevitably accompanied by inflation. As the economy expanded, so wholesalers and retail shops slid their prices up, while employees, seeing that labour was no longer plentiful, began demanding higher wages. More pay for the same amount of work, a higher price for the same goods... a once-familiar pattern. Indeed inflation was an integral part of everyday life. Economics textbooks told their students that 'money acts as a store of value'; yet money which loses 5% of its purchasing power every year is hardly a store of value for one's valuable savings – indeed it was about as useful as a cask with a hole in the bottom for storing vintage brandy!

Fortunately this is no longer a problem, for pay and prices are based on the evaluated labor contained in a product or service and are therefore stable and not subject to inflation even in conditions of full employment. This condition of total monetary stability is ensured by the familiar combination of goodwill and a well-organized system.

The approach to pay and prices is influenced first and foremost by the more enlightened attitude of people towards one another. As to their pay, the preoccupation of most people is not to get as much as they can out of each other, but rather that they should not take from society more than they give. The same rule applies to prices: no one would want to feel that their asking price for a product or service was unfair or excessive.

The pay for the job, or the price of a product or service should be a fair reflection of the work and skill involved; in this way everyone can be sure that trade in all its aspects is fair and equal, value for value.

To achieve this objective, a standard Pay and Price Evaluation system, constantly reviewed and whenever necessary updated, is used to measure work in all its forms and at all levels, taking into account everything from training and responsibility to job satisfaction or concentration. By means of this system a fair remuneration can be established for each job, avoiding both the need and the embarrassment of having to argue – or horror of horrors, strike over it.

Similarly, prices are established by taking the total outgoing expenditure on materials, remunerations, overheads and appropriate capital repayments, then apportioning this total over the products or services rendered. This is calculated on a yearly or half-yearly basis.

Of course this price-calculation process cannot always be precise, so firms may inadvertently make profits at the end of the year, or sometimes losses. Losses are held over to next year and remedial steps taken. Modest profits, this being more generally the case, are apportioned according to formulas set by law and by custom. Part goes to an emergency reserve fund; part goes to the Company for research and development; part goes to the co-workers at all levels in recognition of the success of their collective enterprise. Any surplus is regarded as an excess taken from the customers, and a downward adjustment of future prices would be made.

By this apparently simple yet precise system everyone is satisfied that they are paid in relation to the work they contribute, and prices fairly reflect the work which the goods and services 'contain'.

Thus workers and consumers can be confident, without ever having to think about it, that without any fuss or argument there is a fair remuneration for every job and a fair price for every product and service. Indeed economic and social historians now look back with horror at the strikes and lockouts, often violent, which so often accompanied the historic process of 'free collective bargaining'!

Another major advantage of a universally established Pay, Profit and Price Evaluation system is the resultant monetary stability. The universal use of a stable evaluation system eliminates the possibility of inflation – a concept now consigned to the history books. Thus it is no longer necessary to put the economy into recession and maintain a permanent condition of unemployment in order to check potential or actual inflation.

This being the case it is now considered quite normal that there should be a rewarding job of work available for everyone who wants one. Youngsters can easily find part-time work to provide some independent income or to complement their studies. No one lives under a cloud of fear that they might be made redundant if their product or service is in decline, for alternative employment is easy to find.

And 'retirement' in the sense of enforced idleness as a penalty for maturing years is a thing of the past; as people get older they retire gently, doing a little less each year but retaining their skills and continuing to make a useful contribution to society and their community, perhaps in a teaching or advisory capacity.

And money at last lives up to its requirement as a store of value. Yes, put it under the mattress, no problem. It not only retains its value, it grows in value. For the constant aim to increase productivity ensures that the overall price level of goods and services falls as productivity increases – more and better goods tomorrow with less labour than yesterday.

Full employment opportunity coupled with locally based planning ensures that everyone is able to find work in their own community whatever its size. Physical access to work is also made easy by the compact design of communities, as exemplified particularly in the hilltowns. Within each hilltown access to offices, design studios, and factory control rooms is always within easy walking and elevator reach of one's residence, and 'commuting' time is rarely more than a pleasant five minutes' walk or elevator ride.

The production of physical goods and appliances differs from the old days when globalization was the catchword and large factories produced centrally for distribution over a wide area.

It is no longer considered efficient to move large quantities of physical goods from one part of the planet to another, and there is not the motive of profit or self-aggrandizement, nor the pool of poverty willing to work for a pittance, which previously encouraged the spread of global corporations.

Technology, designs and technical expertise are indeed developed regionally or globally for use on a wide scale to achieve economy and excellence; but designs and informational systems are then licensed in the form of computer programs for use by local businesses. Detailed programs transmitted electronically can be fed directly into automated machines for local manufacture of products moulded in 3D to the most sophisticated designs.

A typical manufacturing facility can be found in the industrial area of our local County Town. It produces a variety of kitchen appliances, such as food processors and whole-grain grinders, mainly for sale in the towns and villages of the local County. These products are all based on various well-known, world-class designs which have been licensed from one of the many specialist industrial design companies whose function is to develop new products or ideas, and continuously refine and improve existing ones.

Within the factory's translucent white walls and double-height ceiling, lit by a soft, evenly spread form of electroluminescence, fully automated machines are silently filling computer-generated moulds with a liquid material based on the abundant resource of clear or pigmented water. The liquid is pumped into watertight moulds and irradiated in the mold with specific high frequency rays to alter its molecular structure, in effect permanently 'freezing' the water into a diamond-hard crystallized form.

This material has an almost infinite variety of uses in products large and small. It can be left clear for glass walls and windows where light is wanted and privacy is not required, or for other glass-like products such as elegant goblets and other items of tableware. Opaque forms of the material are obtained by including a pigmentation; this is used for virtually all large structures and buildings, as well as for manufactured goods, such as machinery, household appliances, transport vehicles and their trackways, even the translucent marble-like pathways that people walk on in the parks.

Once the 'diamond-crystal' material has been hardened, components are automatically ejected from the moulds, and by making use of the various built-in moulded connection points, they can be rapidly assembled by automatic machinery.

The whole process can be remotely monitored with the help of computers and video cameras from offices in a high gallery overlooking the central atrium. Apart from a few maintenance personnel in occasional attendance as required or on a short-shift basis, the only other signs of humanity in the factory itself might be a few curious explorers or a party of schoolchildren on an educational trip in the visitor galleries.

The manufacturing and assembly facilities, located on the lower levels below the central Atrium and the terraced housing, have direct access to the automated underground goods delivery system using the large containers of the County-wide freight system, or the smaller containers of the autodelivery system for local delivery.

The large containers, twelve feet square by twenty-four to thirty-six feet long, magnetically levitated and individually propelled by linear-induction coils, travel between communities totally underground in tunneling. They are destination-coded and can be computer-directed to any part of the County or Region. Except in the case of extra-large sized shipments, such as for a major piece of machinery, these large containers are filled with smaller containers in several modular sizes; the consolidated load travelling between Counties can then be broken down at its destination, and the smaller containers delivered locally by the autodelivery system.

There is a considerable flexibility in labour work schedules. Actual working times are arranged in several short shifts to ensure continuity of service to the customers. Individual time worked is arranged between small groups of working colleagues to suit personal convenience and the overall requirements of the business. The spirit is easy-going and relaxed; but reliability in relation to one's work commitments and colleagues is always scrupulously observed. No one is ever late in honouring a commitment, and last-minute changes are always agreed with colleagues.

Holidays too are arranged to suit mutual convenience. A few days may be taken here and there for some special personal or family occasion, and people will often take a week's break for an extended visit or a country ramble. The average annual 'long' holiday is one to two months. Even longer holidays to distant places or other planets are taken every two or three years. Another popular option is temporary job-trading; people doing similar work in different areas will trade jobs and accommodation with one another for a change of scene.

There are no 'statutory' holidays, though everyone by common consent takes several days off to celebrate the changing of the year from old to new. At this time all non-essential services shut down and everyone enjoys the holiday spirit.

The atmosphere at work is friendly and informal; yet this conceals a high standard of organization. Whether in production or services, the correct quantities of components and materials required are always on hand when they are needed; work-flow is properly organized; working conditions are pleasant. Participants in any commercial enterprise at all levels take their responsibilities to their colleagues and customers very seriously, and the highest degree of professional competence is a matter of pride and prime importance.

Every business has an Executive Supervisory Board representing the business's 'stakeholders': those who have a direct interest in its success. This includes the staff at all levels whose jobs depend on the good management of the business; the Bank responsible for the financial investment; the local community which depends on the business for its prosperity; the business's 'significant suppliers' or distributors; the consumers who use the products or services; and the local educators who see the business as a vehicle for the talents they have encouraged and developed in their students. This Executive Board oversees and monitors the firm's overall business activity, reviews performance and future trends.

Companies still have 'Managers' but they are not considered superior or privileged in any way, financially or otherwise. They simply have a role to play like everyone else, their role being to take an overall view of production and operation, and to coordinate the different functions or departments. Managers will often trade with workers in other fields, and worker-flexibility between different jobs is also encouraged. This provides the opportunity for change, and helps people understand one another's needs so that work can flow more smoothly.

Managers are also responsible for introducing improvements suggested by operatives and for the adoption of any new Standards which may be appropriate to the business. The Standards concept and the high status which it is accorded contributes significantly to the continuous improvement in design, systems and general productivity.

Research companies work constantly to improve designs and work systems, using their own in-house research, and listening both to workers and consumers. Their findings are thoroughly tested and new or improved techniques, ideas and designs are incorporated into the Regional Quality Standards Database.

Every business is required to be conversant with the latest Standards additions and amendments, and to ensure that any relevant improvements are adopted as soon as possible. It is also considered important to 'contribute to the flow', and businesses and their workers take a pride in making continuing improvements large and small in research, design, production and management methods which if found effective are then communicated to the Standards Database for additional testing and promulgation.

Every business must also produce and publish a monthly, independently audited TPA, or Total Performance Audit detailing its financial performance, together with statistics on many other factors such as customer satisfaction, response to queries, faults, quality, workplace conditions, response to and adoption of Standards improvements, and so on. The list will vary for each business. The TPA is reviewed by the Executive Supervisory Board and any shortcomings are quickly rectified.

Goodwill prevails; but the systems are in place and are strictly monitored. The Community Planning Councils provide a forum in which local business activity can be reviewed, new services can be planned and full employment ensured. This in turn guides the flow of credit into productive investment. Pay and Price Evaluation, combined with a high standard of management and pleasant working conditions ensure a stable industrial and business climate.

Designs, production systems and services are continuously improved, backed by the assistance of centralized Standards.

As a result, bankruptcies and business failures are virtually non-existent; and quite unknown is any form of industrial dissension. Everyone enjoys their work, taking a pride in excellence, and pleasure in service to their colleagues and customers. The resultant prosperity, quality of life and available leisure time in turn provide the foundation of material wellbeing allowing mankind to concentrate on artistic, intellectual, and spiritual development.

In mankind's previous phase on Earth, much of the world lived in conditions of extreme poverty with little or no hope of improvement. Even in the more developed nations, unemployment, wasted talent, aggressive competition and strife occupied much energy, diverting it from more productive uses, while incompetent and often corrupt government took some 50% of the gross national product, delivering perhaps a scant 20% of consumable value. A small minority managed to accumulate great wealth, far in excess of any contribution they might make to society, but the vast majority put in long hours of hard work to satisfy the basic needs of life.

Physical sufficiency, the higher spiritual energies, and the universal spirit of cooperation now combine to provide a high standard of living with physical prosperity and an abundance of cultural and intellectual facilities, set amidst the beauties of a cleansed and refreshed environment. Against this background there is leisure time in abundance. And since leisure is not needed to recuperate from the stresses of work, competition and commuting, it can be used for more rewarding ideals and activities.

Leisure begins at home. Every home can be connected to a great web of communication offering a wealth of knowledge, exploration and entertainment.

This is the World Wide Web of old, yet much wider, much faster, even more intuitive in its search-and-find capabilities, and individual reception is optionally three-dimensional and holographic, so that armchair travel can be a truly 'live' experience.

For outdoor recreation, the countryside is ever present, with paved walks and rural pathways available for walking or cycling. In the town centres, the choice of activity is almost limitless. Around the central atrium or in the many smaller squares and courtyards you can stroll, sit, watch the world go by, read or work, attend meetings or concerts large or small, listen to or give an impromptu lecture, consult astrologers and natural therapists, learn ancient Chinese mind-control exercises, swim in one of the glassed-in tropical-garden pools set into the outside surface, or find a quiet corner in the surrounding parkland where you can sit for several hours and hardly see a soul.

In the evenings people still like to 'dress up' for one of the many musical concerts, dramas, comedies or documentary displays.

The evening outing may be preceded or followed by a more formal dinner in a pleasant setting along one of the high galleries overlooking the Central Atrium with its myriad soft lights splashing the tropical plants and trees with color. There are also some smaller, more intimate restaurants secreted in the surrounding parkland, where diners have a choice of indoor or outdoor dining.

To our readers who may be wondering if 'dining out' can be much fun when all you can eat is virtually a fruitarian diet... the answer is that only when you have tasted for yourself our fruits, nuts and grains, so much more varied and so much richer in flavour and nutrition, only then will you begin to see that even with very little preparation every meal can be a taste sensation.

And our chefs certainly know how to prepare the finest, freshest ingredients in an unending variety of ways, using subtle flavours and seasonings, drawing upon the many culinary traditions of the past or creating new taste sensations. Whether presented as a buffet display or on individual plates, dishes are always a visual delight, arranged with the utmost care and an eye for colour and texture.

Nor should it be forgotten that one of the great benefits lies in the after-effects our food *doesn't* have! No one ever gets up after a meal feeling over-stuffed or lethargic, nor is there the longterm damage to health once only too familiar.

Health education teaches that 99% of all illnesses suffered in the old days was caused by fats blocking the body's channels, from the larger arteries pumping blood around the heart, to the many tiny capillaries in the body such as those that serve the brain cells and which when blocked can cause a stroke or partial memory loss. As our nutritionists put it very simply: none of your bodily channels will ever get blocked by the cleansing qualities of pure fruits!

Good health is considered a pleasure to be cultivated and enjoyed, and the physical body is always maintained in top condition. The focus in the New Age is very much on spiritual development and evolution, and as people often like to observe, "the body is the vehicle for the spirit".

Though relaxed and plentiful outdoor exercise is generally preferred, there are gymnastic facilities in every town and village, where people go for a combination of exercise and physical tune-up. It is quite usual for people to look in regularly at their local Health Centre for an 'aura-scan'.

A popular alternative is a deep, relaxing manipulative massage followed by a hot steam bath and a cold dip. This not only tones up and rejuvenates the body, it also allows the expert masseur, whose art combines that of the osteopath or chiropractor, to check over the physical body for any minor dislocations, stress areas, or other abnormalities which can then be quickly rectified.

If there is any deeper unease, perhaps resulting from an unresolved fear or reaction to some traumatic past event, a Healer similar in qualifications and function to the ancient Egyptian Seer Priests will look into the patient's personality and history for the original cause. Quite often the remedy will involve reviewing one's personal Akashic Records then going back under hypnosis to a specific place and time which the Healer has indicated in order to re-live some inappropriate action, confront it, and absorb it, thus nullifying its after-effects.

On the rare occasions where there is some physical problem with the body, herbal remedies will be used, or treatment in which a form of magnetic energy is directed to the affected area. Surgery, that is to say physical operations on the bodily flesh, is no longer practiced.

While organized games are still popular, competitive sport is not played quite the way it used to be. People play purely for pleasure, and games van often seem somewhat chaotic since good nature and having fun take precedence over tiresome rules and there is less inherent desire to compete.

With short and flexible working times there is plenty of opportunity for every kind of leisure pursuit either day-by-day or as part of a longer holiday break.

There are so many ways of taking a holiday; many people simply travel around on the fully integrated transit systems, usually taking the slow Rural Lines as much as possible. One can travel to a planned route, or simply 'browse the system', taking whatever line and whatever direction looks appealing!

On all transit vehicles it is possible to check accommodation at the next stop on the computer screen available to each individual seat; databases can be readily accessed giving descriptions and illustrations of local accommodation options, as well as descriptions of the surrounding area and things to see. Reservations are confirmed instantly through the computer terminal. Paying a deposit on a booking is unheard-of; but it is equally unheard-of to make any kind of a reservation whether for transport, restaurant, hotel or whatever, then not turn up! Notice of cancellation is always meticulously given, together with an explanation and a sincere apology, when reservations cannot be honoured.

Popular for shorter holidays, especially with families, are the Country Resorts of which there are quite a few in the outlying wilderness areas of every County, located in various scenic spots such as lakesides, large forest clearings or mountain areas. They are always located on, or within a short walk of one of the Rural Lines.

A typical resort might be a low semi-circular building in three sloping terraces of self-contained holiday apartments, with a green lawn, perhaps, sloping gently down to the lake in front. A café/restaurant serves the residents and passing walkers.

Life here is peaceful and relaxing, the days' activities consisting of mountain climbing or forest walking, perhaps returning tired and hungry – though bodily toned-up and spiritually refreshed – by the Rural Line transit. Early morning swims in the lakes are also popular, perhaps followed by a brisk half-hour walk before breakfast.

Despite the low profile of resort buildings and the relaxed, 'communing-with-nature' pleasures enjoyed by their visitors, the accommodations would be considered luxurious by old standards. Each apartment is a tastefully furnished suite, comprehensively equipped and immaculately maintained, fronted by its own private terrace-balcony. This is no exception but quite normal given the greater prosperity, and affordable for everyone, large families included.

Here, one can 'stay put' for a couple of relaxing weeks, or make a tour of several resorts. Advance booking is simple by computer, and luggage can be sent forward by the autodelivery system so that one can enjoy an unencumbered walk to the next resort along the well marked woodland trails.

One very popular recreation is known as the 'wilderness experience'. The typical County consists of its County Town at the hub, with its dependent towns, villages and neighbourhoods surrounding and linked to it, the density gradually becoming thinner and the character more 'laid-back' and rural, the farther one gets from the Centre.

Though the County is adequately spread to allow plenty of natural environment between habitation areas, it is nonetheless relatively compact overall. Between Counties, there is always a substantial area of wilderness. This gives identity to the County, and provides breathing space for Nature, as well as recreational space for those seeking solitude.

The 'wilderness experience' gives humans a chance to commune intimately with Nature in all her aspects. This was of course a fairly common practice in the old days, but today 'communion with Nature' takes on a different, and a much deeper significance. It is now possible to communicate with animals, birds, even trees and plants on the higher, spiritual level. This is partly an aspect of the general awareness that all Creation is One – this being understood as a very practical fact, not a matter of high-sounding words!

People are fully aware that they as individuals are an integral part of the whole of Creation, an attitude which makes it very easy to identify 'self' with every aspect of the natural surroundings. In the case of animals and birds, communication can be more direct; this is speech on a mental level and can reach considerable depths of mutual understanding particularly through those humans willing to give of their time and patience.

Even for ordinary walkers and hikers it is quite common for animals and humans to exchange greetings and routine information on such topics as the weather or the condition of the trail. Animals may also approach humans for help, perhaps to remove a stone lodged in a hoof or a thorn in the side. On the rare occasion when a walker or climber may have a serious physical accident it would be quite normal for animals to come instinctively to the rescue, to run for help or to keep an injured body warm while waiting for the rescue party.

The wilderness is wilderness. So the expression goes, and although there are cleared trails, signs put out where necessary, and small hospitality cabins provided, these intrusions are all kept very rustic in character, designed and located to minimize their impact on the natural scene. This is done out of respect for Nature, and for the humans too, for those enjoying the spirit and atmosphere of the wilderness will not want to be confronted at every turn by human artifacts!

The small hospitality cabins are freely available for individual or family use. If you're carrying a 'personal communicator' you can check a map of the area, with red or green spots indicating cabins that are free or occupied. Otherwise you take pot luck! If you want a cabin and find a free one, it's yours, for a day or a week. There is only one important rule, unfailingly observed: always leave the cabin clean and tidy.

The cabins are well spaced out to maintain the feeling of human isolation and wilderness communication, though the occupants are generally happy to welcome passers-by for refreshment and conversation.

Hospitality is a great tradition; its arts are even taught in schools! The two main rules of hospitality are first that the host should offer it freely, generously and with love; the second is that the guest should never abuse the privilege. As the saying goes, "always leave your host wishing you had stayed longer!"

The 'wilderness experience' provides an opportunity for self-refreshment and a mutually enriching communion with the 'wildlife'. But it is also practiced more seriously as a unification of self with the whole of creation, and as such it is seen as an important contribution to the individual's training and evolutionary progress.

For a change of setting and tempo another popular option is a cruise in one of the large circular air-cruise ships which travel silently around the planet, presenting their passengers with a new and different scene every day.

These air-borne cruise ships have exterior-facing suites right around the outer perimeter. For their 'ports of call' they are capable of floating offshore on water or alighting on dry land, allowing them to visit remoter areas where there is no existing accommodation.

And for 'something completely different' the more adventurous can travel in the interplanetary spaceships to see different ways of life on other planets. These spaceships depart from several Interplanetary Ports around the globe, directly connected to the nearest Regional Capital and thence, via the Inter-County grid, to every County Town.

Learning is also considered a leisure activity. Everyone enjoys their work, as well as the pleasurable sensation of contributing to the society of which they are a part. Work is there for everyone, it is productive and pleasant. There is thus an ever-present incentive to gain and improve skills, to develop talents to the full, and this is undertaken at all ages with considerable enthusiasm.

Even in their later years people do not retire, they simply work shorter hours as they get older and continue to pursue their educational interests, to improve their skills or keep up with the latest technological developments.

The needs of knowledge are richly provided for in the extensive Halls of Learning complete with libraries and archives. The Akashic Records can also be accessed to delve into history, or to explore the remoter corners of Earth or other planets through the medium of multi-dimensional 'virtual reality'.

Learning is a pleasure, an on-going process that starts early and never really finishes, as youngsters embark on the great journey of knowledge, and people of all ages expand their skills or merely seek to satisfy their insatiable curiosity.

Humanity is no longer engaged in strife and conflict, no longer embroiled in battles for personal prestige or national supremacy. The motivations of individual enterprise, initiative, growth and development remain as strong as ever; indeed these features are enhanced by the pleasure and satisfaction of their own rewards. But they are tempered by the limitation of respect for others; growth comes through collaboration with others, not at the expense of others.

With conflict replaced by collaboration, energies find new directions: in culture, beauty, creativity, the arts, nature, and the simple pleasures of friends and community. When a rock is removed revealing a plant struggling for growth, that plant will suddenly flourish and blossom.

So with humanity. When the rock of conflict is removed, spiritual and intellectual growth can begin, destined to reach new heights of intellectual, cultural and spiritual development.

So I thank you for taking this Journey with me. I hope that it will give you both inspiration and a vision which will help bring you to this New Time. For although it already exists, the distance you will need to travel to reach it is in your hands.