

The Eden Project

by Mike Rayner

*We are stardust
We are golden
And we've got to get ourselves
Back to the garden*

Joni Mitchell (Woodstock)

According to the Bible, the Garden of Eden was the home of the first two humans, Adam and Eve. In the story, the Garden provided everything the couple needed, and they lived there in peace and happiness until they were banished for breaking the rules. In 1999, Tim Smit, an ex-rock musician and record producer, borrowed the name of the biblical garden for a collection of space-age domes in a corner of southwest England - the Eden Project.

Rock and activism

It is not unusual for people involved in the music business to alert us to environmental and political issues. Bob Geldof (the singer from British punk band The Boomtown Rats) raised a huge amount of money to help feed millions of starving people in Africa in 1985, Bono from U2 has been successful in campaigning for the reduction of debts which developing countries owe to rich nations, and the music festival at Woodstock in 1969 is seen by many as the culmination of the civil rights marches and anti-war protests of the 1960's. Tim Smit's Eden Project was created to highlight the relationship between humans and the environment, and through information, research and education lead the way to a brighter future.

The problem

The modern world is a far cry from the balance and harmony of the Garden of Eden. By-products of a typical modern lifestyle such as overfishing, deforestation and intensive farming are destroying natural habitats, and creating a world with less biodiversity. These activities are not sustainable, that is the planet is unable to survive if we continue to take more from the Earth than it can replace. Recent research by the World Wildlife Fund suggests that we will have to colonise two planets the same size as the Earth by 2050 unless people in rich countries change the way they live.

The solution

The Eden Project is in on the site of an abandoned clay pit in Cornwall, and consists of two enormous domes, or biomes, and an outdoor area. The first biome houses a humid tropical zone representing Malaysia, West Africa and South America, and is the biggest greenhouse in the world. The second biome is a warm temperate zone which contains the type of environment found in Mediterranean countries, California and South West Australia. The outdoor area displays a collection of plants and landscapes typical of temperate climates like those in Britain, parts of North America, Russia and India.

As visitors to the domes walk past lakes and waterfalls, through rainforests and over deserts, they discover how the ecosystems in each zone operates, learn how people have damaged each environment, and find out how people native to the different areas can learn to live in harmony with their environment, and have a positive and beneficial effect on it.

Science, Horticulture, Creative, Marketing, Media and Human Resources researchers at the site are constantly investigating ways of combining science, art, technology and communication in new ways to find solutions to the problem of living a modern lifestyle in harmony with the natural world. The researchers form part of a new green movement, which is discovering new uses for plants including plant plastics, medicines and oils.

Success

Eden Project has been enormously successful in the years it has been open. Millions of people have flocked to the site, and the biomes also attracted the attention of the director of the James Bond film 'Die Another Day', in

which the domes featured as the lair of the villain, Gustav Graves. In 2002 the biomes were also the venue for a music festival featuring Pulp, Spiritualized, Doves and other major acts who performed amongst the foliage. Works of art from around the world are also on display, and the following summer the events included a play based on a story by Monty Python's Terry Jones.

The future

But the Eden Project is no Disneyland, "If this place becomes no more than an upmarket theme park, it will all have been a gigantic waste of money" Tim Smit writes in the visitor's guide (the domes cost 86 million pounds.) After a day spent walking around the biomes in Cornwall, he hopes that visitors will be inspired find out more about ecology, look at ways of changing their lifestyles, and participate in trying to get the human race back into the Garden of Eden.

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