

Botanic Extravaganza

"The world's biggest greenhouse"—part of a huge botanical complex being built in an old mine in Cornwall, England—won't be finished until next year, but it's already proving to be a prime tourist attraction.

The idea for the Eden Project was hatched in a pub a couple of years ago by plant scientists working on the restoration of the famous 19th century Heligan gardens in Cornwall. According to Eden adviser Ghilleen Prance, former director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, half of the \$120 million project is being financed as one of the U.K.'s Millennium projects and



Biomes rising in Cornwall.

the rest by the European Union and other sources.

The complex will contain three biomes, two of them enclosed in gigantic south-facing organically shaped geodesic domes nestled in a clay mine. A tropical biome will be the

"biggest closed rainforest anywhere," says Prance, covering nearly 2.5 hectares and 45 meters at its tallest point. The other greenhouse will contain a Mediterranean environment, while an open-air biome will be Cornish. The installation will be an educational cornucopia and a boon for plant science, says Prance, who disdains any comparison with America's controversial Biosphere project in Arizona. The Eden Project is "serious science," he says.

A visitor center, which offers train rides around the construction site, opened last month. "We expected 2000 a day, and the first week we had 20,000," says Prance. The whole production is scheduled to open in April 2001.

The Right Stuff

It was built to show off the scientific and engineering muscle of communism, but Russia's Mir space station, now privately operated, is well on its way to becoming a playground for wealthy American capitalists. A well-heeled Californian wants to book a stay on the station and become the world's first paying space tourist. Dennis Tito, a money manager and former aerospace engineer in Santa Monica, plans to pay up to \$20 million for the excursion, which is slated for sometime next year. The 59-year-old Tito is already training in Russian facilities.

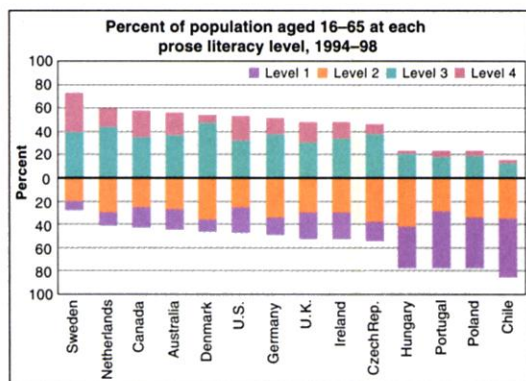
First order of business, however, is to spruce up the orbiting lab, which suffers from computer glitches, air leaks, and the detritus accumulated over more than a decade of operations. Two cosmonauts returned to Earth on 16 June after 2 months of work on the station, which had been in mothballs since last year (*Science*, 14 April, p. 242). But Mir will soon be "ready to receive Dennis and the other citizen explorers who will follow," promises Chirineev Kathuria, a Chicago-based investor in the Amsterdam-based Mir Corp.

Mir Corp. president Jeff Manber says that tourism is only part of the company's long-term plan for Mir. He also foresees the space station as a center for "pharmaceutical research and other traditional space activities."

Countries Ranked for Literacy

Northern Europe wins in a walk when it comes to literacy, according to the final report of the International Adult Literacy Survey, "Literacy in the Information Age." The survey, released earlier this month by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and Statistics Canada, covers three areas: prose literacy, document literacy (ability to read maps and tables), and numeracy. It provides comparable data on 68,755 adults aged 16 to 65 in 17 countries in Europe and North America, plus Australia, New Zealand, and Chile.

Levels of prose literacy ranged from the abil-



ity to decipher the prescribed dosage on a bottle of pills, to using a manual to adjust a bicycle seat, to restating information from a pamphlet on hiring interviews. Quantitative abilities ranged from adding up a simple bill to juggling grams, calories, and percentages to estimate fat content in a Big Mac.

Weakest of the northern European crowd are the U.K. and Ireland, half of whose adults are below Level 3, which means they do not possess skills "considered a suitable minimum for coping with the demands of everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society." For more on the survey, go to www.oecd.int

A Sharper Image

7th graders at a Chicago-area school before a recent tour of Fermilab. The kids emerged with considerably hipper ideas, however, as shown by before-and-after drawings presented to the lab "sort of as a thank you," says spokesperson Mike Perricone. Kyle, whose work is shown here, used to think the typical scientist "would not want to be doing anything else." Now he knows that many wear jeans and striped shirts, and are interested in "many other lively endeavors, like kids or marriage."

What does a scientist look like? It wears a white lab coat and glasses, and carries a test tube. That, at least, was the vision of most of the

