open concourse

...not yet seen and its whole width is brought into the apparent area of the exhibition. You are now at the head of the main concourse, the limits of which are defined on either flank by the long glass façade of the Transport building and the rising curve of the Dome of Discovery. Above the entire scene the Skyline is poised as a dramatic punctuation mark.

The upper platform of the main concourse, 16, is flanked by con-shaped aluminium porticoes, leading into the two main sequences of exhibition buildings. Into the left-hand one, 17—the entrance to the Land of Britain—the itinerary now takes you. Entering a sort of cave-mouth between rough stone walls set into a boulder-strewn hillock, you are swallowed up in a sequence of dimly lit chambers depicting the geological evolution of the British Isles. At the far end you are released into the Natural Scene, a brightly lit space (in contrast to the darkness of the other) dramatically rising in height and filled with the cries and whistles of birds. In the centre is a massive, twisted plaster tree, round which (see drawing above) runs a robust wooden gallery of rumps and steps, making spatial play in a limited area. The gallery is asymmetrical and creates a changing perspective from level to level. At the foot of the tree, 18, is an irregular woodland garden of leaves and wild flowers. And water, the most versatile element in the exhibition, vascular, lies in quiet sandy pools.

Climbing upwards and obtaining an impression of liveliness and flexibility of plan from the sight of other visitors crossing your path below and above you, as you and they circulate among the rumps and staircases, you eventually emerge on the upper level of the Countryside building into a long gallery devoted to crops and produce. At this point, and at many points afterwards, another specialty of the exhibition plan becomes apparent: the effectiveness of the frequent panoramic views, framed within the interior structure of the buildings, that are contrived so as to furnish unexpected but well-composed pictures of the bright outdoor world. They occur at all levels. 20, for example, allows you a glance back across the centre of the concourse through the escape doors at the end of the first floor produce gallery you have just reached.

A subtle variation of the same theme is performed along the whole...