Communities:

Beneficio: Europe’s largest and oldest hippie community is located in a valley in the Sierra Nevada mountains in the province of Granada, Andalusia [Spain], several kilometres away from Orgiva.

"Beneficio is a therapy and a school of life," defines Kalpeshwar Giri, one of its most colourful inhabitants.

They are the grandchildren as it were, of those who attended the Woodstock festival in 1969. Today most prefer the alternative name of the rainbow family (the family of the rainbow).

They agree, however, with the politics of the Woodstock generation and in particular with the finding of a place to live in step with nature. With some pride, they proclaim that they have no illusions in the Babylonian personification of money in the city, or of its dehumanization and consumerism.

"I do not feel free with a steady job," admits Moona. "And above all I value freedom," she says. Moona is a twenty year old Italian who identifies with the values of the rainbow family: peace, love, freedom, spirituality and respect for nature. "So I have come to Beneficio: I've been here three months"

Founded in 1987 after a English couple bought a farmhouse and land in the Beneficio Valley, hence the name; it now is home to 250 -300 people with maybe 50 children. In 2013 it was reported that moves were underway for the community to buy the property.

It is Europe’s largest and oldest alternative community. It is a community open to all. It does not judge or discriminate. It is often referred to as a permanent rainbow gathering given its international character. There are no rules, excepting alcohol and meat which are banned and the unwritten rule of respecting nature, and no leaders as such. A general hippie ethos prevails, which means that people try and work things out peacefully and people share and share alike. It’s a tolerant place and many people walk around naked without thinking anything of it. Some live pretty much a naked lifestyle such as Mira who lived here for some years. He feels that you are only free when you are naked.

Isolated in the mountains with no running water or electricity (a few have solar panels on their homes), these modern hippies have recreated their own utopia set in Eucalyptus forest and fruit trees. Potable water comes from a waterfall at the top of the valley which forms into a stream which zig zags its way through the trees to a pond where everyone bathes.

Inhabitants live largely in various styles of light shelters such as tents, benders, and tipis although some more permanent structures have been built, including straw bale constructions, reflecting the principles of permaculture.

There are also a number of people living in vehicles along the dirt road that leads up to the Beneficio valley.
Inside Beneficio there are small businesses, including a shop, bakeries, free range eggs, and cheese making. There are shared facilities including a large communal tipi, shared outdoor kitchen, composting toilet, and a sports pitch.

Residents have completely independent finances. There are little shared expenses and additional donations are made by magic hat. Even though the costs of living at Beneficio are not great residents still need some income. Some have money from their families others such as Vincent, a 50 year old Belgian, play the Spanish guitar for tourists of Almuñécar.

Taking advantage of a clearing in the middle of the valley, the community has erected a huge tipi with the interior decorated with religious motifs. Here musical instruments are played, there is singing and this is where the communal meals are held, but only of vegetarian food, because here the meat and alcohol are prohibited. This place is called The Big Lodge, the great tipi, and is the inner sanctum of the community, which must be accessed barefoot. Inside, its members sit on mats arranged in a circle around the sacred fire.

"We welcome everyone and no one imposes nothing. We only ask respect for whoever comes, says Tierce Peter, a Slovak of 24 years of age who has built his house with straw bales. "It has cost me 200 Euros and I have no mortgage to pay," he says.

If there’s anything to be learnt at Beneficio it’s the value of a dream. And making it real. (Tom Thumb 2013.)

Beneficio is one of several hippie communities in this part of Spain.

El Morreon was founded by Israelis who arrived in the eighties and is formed on a pre-existing settlement.

Los Cigarrones is a tiny hamlet which has had an alternative character since the late seventies. Today it is really a collection of vehicles. These began turning up from 1988. The well known Dragon Festival began in 1997. The site was damaged by flooding in 2010. The festival is now at Sante Fe.

San Pedro is at a secluded bay of the same name on the Mediterranean coast near Nerja.

At Alhambra, inland, there is a cave community.

It is worth mentioning Maro Cove also known as Calla Chica (small cove) on the Costa de Sol East. Not a community as such but a beach with a hippie tradition and caves used by travellers.

Sources: MG magazine (Spanish translation), Wikepedia, IC website, Mira Ahimsa, Tom Thumb, G.D.
Pictures of Beneficio.

Final comments.

Please feel free to email me gerald.davidson@paradise.net.nz with suggestions, comments, articles, photographs, anything useful. Please send me new addresses to be added to the circulation list. Please forward the Newsmail to those interested. Nothing is copywrite, though you should cite the credit if there is one. That’s all from me. It is a pleasure doing this. Lots of love. Magic. Hugs. And blessings. Gerald.