

Holidays

It's taken me a fair while to work out what holidays are about – depending on your definition of 'Holiday' – particularly when it comes to summer holidays. In your own country.

This year the family dragged me to the Far North – for those not in New Zealand that's at the top (northern) of the North Island – where the sun shines and the sand is bright and endless. Where, on a good day, the heat forces you into the shade, before you fall asleep and become another potential melanoma statistic.

Seriously, holidays have, for me, usually been the 'lets go somewhere and do a myriad of things to keep everyone happy' type, inevitably involving spending largish sums of money in what is euphemistically called the pursuit of happiness. In younger years this involved a considerable amount of time in an aeroplane, getting from home to wherever in the world, nice while it involved me doing little or no flying for work. Nowadays the opposite is true – every week at least one flight, sometimes two and, on a bad week, three. All return. So for me, flying doesn't hold the cachet it once did. And, by association, not for the family either.



Holidays are now a time when feet are firmly on the ground, where enjoyment comes from watching the sun rise and set, or listening to the putter of a 'tinnie' setting out into azure blue seas to throw a hopeful line. Or, as I write this, the stutter of a two-stroke failing to fire up. Happens more often than you think...

In a past life I lived in the Northern Hemisphere, where at this time of year, the weather is cold, the days are short and the emphasis on elongated holidays is, simply, non-existent.

Christmas enters the shops in mid-October and by Boxing Day ceases to have any focus at all. The day itself is usually spent in

eating, drinking and exchanging gifts. And sitting by the fire keeping warm.

By contrast, as I see it, Christmas hits the cavernous halls of Westfield's Cathedrals of Capitalism around late October, is kept running by advertising as long as possible to encourage you to spend more than you can afford. On the day – like our Northern cousins – the emphasis is on food, drink and exchanging gifts. Thereafter the focus is on the long, hot (if we're lucky) summer and the elongated January holiday.



And the gifts? Thoughtfulness is usually the domain of the organised, who somehow create the time to think about the recipient and to make the gift to them something interesting, useful, thoughtful and memorable. For the rest of us, it's a last minute (why? we've had since October and it isn't as though Christmas only happens once in our lifetime) grab of something that might hopefully, please, fit the bill.

Then there's the predictable type of gift – the one where the 'inspiration' comes from the hobby, the

passion, the interest or the job.

Which could explain why, this Christmas family and friends contributed long and hard to the J. Clarkson retirement fund... not one, but three Clarkson books.

Also, for good measure, one Hammond book. And, if that didn't do the trick, well a James May tome was also provided.

It's not that I am ungrateful – far from it – I learnt a long time ago that all gifts are to be gratefully received.



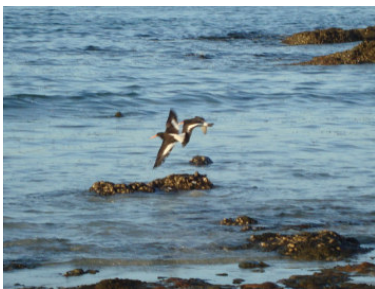
Nope it's that Holidays are, for me – now – about getting away from work, about not thinking about writing (OK this is an exception) about relaxing, about rest, about drawing inspiration from the things around you. Or simply enjoying the break.

And, surprise, one of the five books provided an interesting read, full of reminders of my past 51 years and a chance to see how much – or in this case little – the teens know about their world and the inventions of the past 107 years. Apart from the

cell phone and the iPod that is.

James May's book the 20th Century is an excellent holiday book, easy to read, delightfully broken down into short chapters so you can pick it up or put it down at will. The book traces the 100 years of the 20th century; where flight became an everyday occurrence, where mass manufacturing was invented, where electronic communication by wireless radio, pictures (still, moving, and colour) and telephone all came into being. Mass generation of electricity was finally rationalised – the pages on the fight over AC and DC current is fascinating if somewhat morbid. Where man first set foot on the moon. Where the car became dominant as the main method of daily transportation for the masses and how the computer has taken control over our lives.

May is a fascinating character, revealed by his take on the universe and other terrestrial beings in his book clearly he marches to the beat of his own drum. Unlike his fellow Top Gear presenters. One who appears intent on beating the drum of rage, Clarkson against Vauxhall and BMW, the Establishment and anyone else who doesn't agree with him. And Hammond, well he'll feast forever on his close shave with death. May has a favourite car (the 1985 Aston Martin V8 Vantage), but also enjoys trying other experiences, his TV series on wine with Oz Clarke a stunning example. As a holiday book, May's take on the 20th Century is inspired. And I enjoyed it. Fully.



Almost as much as I enjoyed playing the 1983 edition of Trivial Pursuit with teenagers and early twentysomethings who weren't born when the questions were set... bliss. Except it made me feel old... I also enjoyed the long hot days, the dawn walks, the hill climbs for the view, the starlight beach walks and the golf. The family enjoyed being around each other – shocking for teenagers – and simply being laid back.

We didn't appreciate the noisy 'city folk' who shouted rather than talked, acted like they owned the beach, rode quad bikes like the police were chasing them – and who should have been – jetski'd and water-skied only metres from the beach in amongst swimming kids and, according to the locals, should have been shot at birth.

OK they were having fun, but with no consideration for everyone else on the beach. See, the trouble with reading Clarkson is that you can end up like him, railing against everything and anyone.

To avoid this (and the 'city folk' did calm down and became quite friendly) the Clarkson tomes were laid aside, the May book was enjoyed, the holiday was fun and for my family it also marked the end of an era. Our daughters (the Teen Testers of the past 5 years) are both at University, the youngest starting this year, and this was likely to be the last family holiday for a very long time.

Make the most of any holiday; enjoy the time, the leisure and the rest.

We did.

