

The View from Vaupillon or Tacchi's Tittle-Tattle

Week 6

Monday May 18 to Sunday May 24

Monday May 18

The temperate nature of the climate continues to improve such that this morning my first circuit of exercise was undertaken in a short sleeved shirt. Whilst walking towards the river I heard a bird song that was unknown to me. I scanned the horizon and eventually saw a jay. I never realised before that I was completely unaware of that bird's song. I assume that it was calling to either find a mate or to warn other jays that this particular piece of woodland was its territory.

On Friday I went out for my weekly shop at the local supermarket. An email sent to me by the store indicated that there was a promotion at the fish counter on haddock fillets. However when I arrived no haddock was available, not even for ready money. BUT, there was whole salmon, gutted and fresh on sale at €7.95 per kilo. Immediately I procured one and rushed home to start the procedure of hot-smoking it so that it would be available for consumption during the weekend. I also took the opportunity to smoke some garlic and a good handful of salt, as to purchase these items is enormously expensive relative to their unsmoked cost.

As mentioned in a previous post we had a couple of chums over for lunch yesterday. It was a very pleasant experience, not in the least diminished by consuming a bottle of champagne before we sat down to eat. The trouble with a good lunch is that the bathroom scales the following morning are inclined to wag a disapproving finger and indeed this was the case. So now I have to be a 'good boy' and commit to an abstemious couple of days. This is not as simple as it sounds. The problem being that I have a morbid fear of there not being enough food to completely overfeed all my guests. My policy is normally to assume that two extra guests will somehow magically appear and need to be fed, also each person present will consume twice as much as me. Unfortunately the reality is that no extra mouths appear to be fed and that the majority of the diners actually consume less than me. The upshot of all this is that after the festivities have concluded there remains a considerable pile of tasty food of which I am loathe to throw away. Thus I have to find ways of using up the leftovers without over-consuming. I agree that there are worse problems to have especially in these 'interesting' times.

Tuesday May 19

We seem to be blessed with sunshine at the moment, so much so that Mrs. T. has deemed the weather to be sufficiently clement to bring out the remainder of her plants from the greenhouse, perhaps tempting fate as there is the old saw 'Ne'er cast a clout till May is out'. Hopefully the climate here is more temperate than the parts of the UK where this saying originated. In fact the French have a somewhat similar expression with a date of May 15, so it appears that all should be well.

On my perambulations yesterday I saw two minor interesting pieces of nature. The first was a heron taking off close by the pond I always pass. This not good news for the frogs that inhabit it but maybe my continued presence will cause it to hunt elsewhere. One of my good friends once told me how to cook heron. The basic plan is you first catch your heron and then take two large planks of wood and tie these around the bird. Then you find a container large enough and place the prepared heron in it and fill with water and bring to the boil and let it cook for about eight hours. You then remove the wood sandwich and untie the parcel, discard the heron and eat the planks. My second was a small snake of about six inches, it was basking on the warm asphalt and when it sensed me it attempted, in a rather inexperienced way, to slither off into the undergrowth. I suspected it was very recently hatched and as its antics made it difficult to spot exactly what type of squamata it was. It was probably a grass snake as we often find those in these parts, frequently well over a metre in length.

Wednesday May 20

Again this morning the weather is extremely pleasant, as indeed it was all of yesterday. In fact it was so good that it was perfect for an afternoon bicycle ride but I had so many chores that no time was available, perhaps today.

The first task of the day was to collect the masks that had been ordered from the local supermarket and as it was market day I decided to kill two birds with one stone. The market is best for fresh

produce, especially eggs, cream and some cheese whilst the supermarket furnishes dry goods and the like. As usual at the supermarket I had some minor issues with the many and varied coupons that are available and I had some for Lavazza coffee which, coincidentally, was on promotion. This caused problems as to whether my vouchers were valid for those purchases. After much toing and froing it was decided that I could have the rebate on half of my coffee purchases. Whilst on the subject of the supermarket another 'good thing' is that at the beginning of March they started to install charging points for electric vehicles, unfortunately due to the current 'situation' the installation team retired unhurt but I am reliably informed that it is only 'weeks' before they return to finish the works.

Another important task was to fulfil my promise to Mrs. T. to remove my beard and cut my hair after our first social encounter involving food and friends. This I undertook in two parts, the first being the removal of the facial hair. The second required Mrs. T. to wield the electric hair clippers, an act of unbridled faith by your humble scribe. As per usual my belief was well founded and I finished up with a head of short hair and a clean-shaven face. A mildly amusing aside is that after the face had been attended to I had a video Skype conversation with a chum which was repeated later in the day when my head had been laid bare. On neither occasion did my correspondent notice my change in appearance.

In the afternoon my bridge team were involved in an online bridge match. This was the first time I had actually played bridge in over two months. I am not overly fond of bridge played via computer, I enjoy the intimacy of the fellow competitors. However it was only a short match of fourteen boards, taking about 80 minutes and importantly we won, which of course adds to the pleasure. We have another match this evening and if we win that we will continue in the competition that has been organised by our local league. If we win a sufficient number of matches we could keep going for fourteen games.

Thursday May 19

Yesterday, 'Phew What a Scorcher' would have been the Vaupillon Times headline had such a publication existed. Today's forecast is more of the same, temperatures in the mid to high twenties. Precautions in the shape of a hat were undertaken when exercising outdoors as now with my severe haircut I am liable to sunburn on my head.

Today is yet another Bank Holiday- Ascension - it is always falls on a Thursday. Many French, and particularly Parisians 'faire le pont' or in other words build a bridge between the holiday and the weekend, which is just a long-winded way of saying they take the Friday as holiday so as to have a long weekend.

With the current glorious climate droves of Parisians are fleeing the capital for a weekend in the countryside's sunshine. You may recall from an earlier post that they are permitted to travel up to 100 kilometres from their principal abode, however the favourite haunt of many of the capital's residents is the Côte Fleurie or the area on the Normandy coast of Deauville and the surrounding holiday resorts. A further attraction may well be that the Deauville race course is having a meeting today. Deauville is approximately two hundred kilometres from the centre of Paris.

The bad news for the travellers who left for the coast yesterday was that the gendarmes were watching on the motorways leaving Paris and noting the number plates of the cars as they left. A further 100 kilometres along the autoroute were more gendarmes armed with the list of departing vehicles and they were then stopped and the occupants each subject to a fine of €135. To add insult to injury they were then hit with the news that they would face a similar fine for the return trip.

There are quite a few weekend visitors in the local neighbourhood but they are probably a lot less likely to attract the attention of the authorities as their journey on the motorways would have then exiting at Chartres, well within the confinement rules.



On the left are some bees taking advantage of some of the orange poppies in Mrs. T.'s garden. And on the right is the amazing rose bush that adorns the arched entrance to our humble abode.

Friday/Saturday May 22/23

I have decided to take a short sabbatical. When I heard about Dominic Cummings's flagrant disregard for social distancing I knew I would have to have a rant. I also knew that I had promised to stop the rants, but this was just SO bad that had I posted then I could not have restrained myself. So as my mother says 'If you can't say something nice, don't say anything' and thus the only option is to refrain from writing anything. If there is an outbreak of good sense from the UK government and he is sent on his way then I shall resume, but I am not holding my breath. I suspect that the Prime Minister is addicted to the the venom that spews forth from every orifice of that person.

I am also hopeful that in less than ten days there will be further, warranted, relaxations in the confinement in France, maybe even the chance of some hostleries being open for business, fingers are crossed, and if I am right then joyous news might rekindle the Calliopean muse within my troubled breast.

A bientôt.

