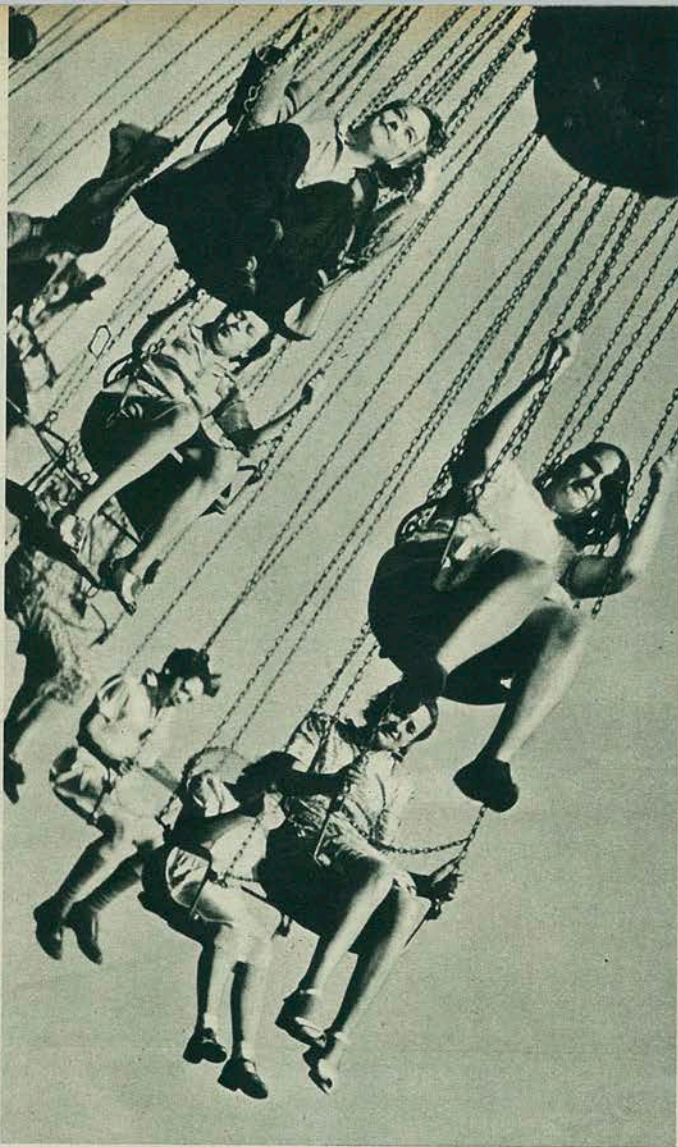


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**Fun Of The Fair**, enjoyed to the sound of blaring electric organs, adds zest to the seaside holidays of those who like to be with the crowd and prefer taking their pleasures noisily



**Call Of The Country** is answered by the seekers after solitude. In the tree-lined lanes of old England they find a never-ending source of wonderment

## HOLIDAY ROUND-UP

# Having a Wonderful Time . . .

Where this year? To the soft South or to the rugged North? To share packed beaches or to find solitude deep in the country of Old England?

by H. E. BATES

**W**HEN I was still so young that I did not know my left shoe from my right, and sometimes went to school with the toes pointing outwards with a slightly splay-footed effect, I was taken, on a memorable and never-to-be-forgotten day in August, on my first holiday to the seaside.

My father, in my recollection, seems to have spent most of the previous night packing the set of tin trunks and straw dress cases that were then in vogue, and my mother seems to have spent most of the time since dawn packing prodigious mountains of ham sandwiches "so that you won't starve before you get there," and an equally formidable bundle of instruments to protect us from, or let us enjoy, the fickle and unpredictable qualities of the English climate. Umbrellas, sunshades, spades, walking sticks and so on, were lashed together in a vast bundle, which it was my unutterably joyous privilege to carry.

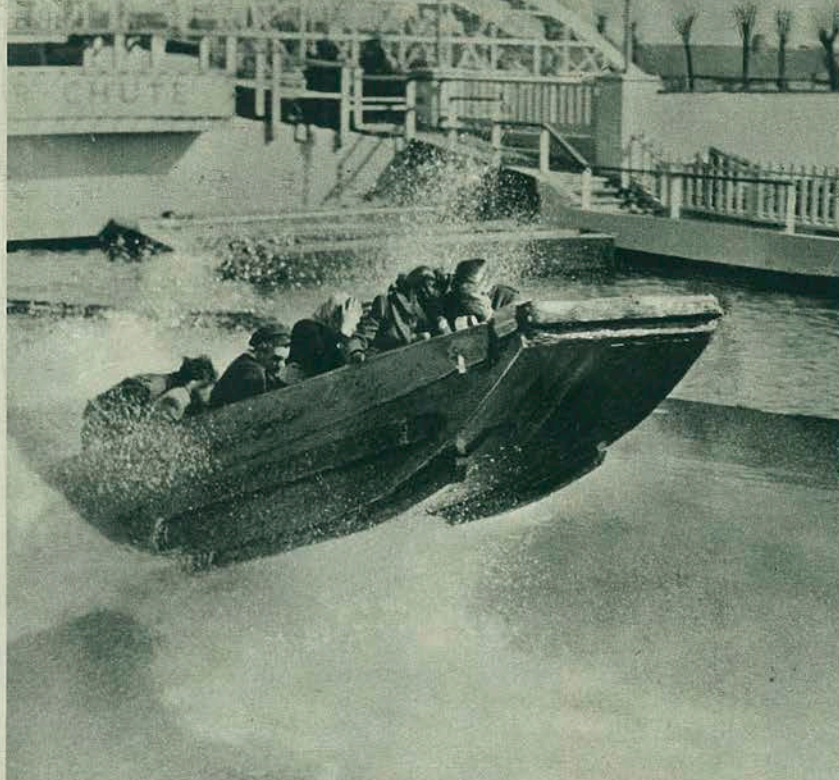
Eventually, in my excitement, I fell over it when the fly arrived. The fly, a sort of cab, was the miracle of the age. It was the pinnacle of all heights of luxury. Inside it smelled of straw, old men, horse manure, harness oil and weddings; outside it gleamed like a black-leaded kitchen stove, flashing carriage lamps of silver. The horse moved with the labour of a tortoise drawing lead weights. Anxiety and agitation filled my mother, who kept saying, "We shall miss it!" A masculine aura of experienced calm surrounded my father, who was used to travelling, and gave the impression that trains would wait for him for ever.

Hideous dread filled me, who could only fear horribly that trains never waited. My grandmother raised her own knuckle-rapping umbrella and told me not to fidget (I later got my revenge on her by letting the umbrella parachute out to sea) and I pressed my nose against the window of the cab and felt the immeasurable pride and

wonder of being able to look down on a world not so fortunate as ourselves. We were alone in the great privilege of going on holiday to the sea.

At the station catastrophe fell on us, for it then appeared that a million other people were going to the sea. A million other buckets and spades, a million other harassed mothers, a million other irate grandmothers. Bawling infants pinching their fingers in push-chairs, shrieking young ladies, dashing young men in boaters and blazers. Horrible people to whom one never spoke at home and who now called out, with ghastly familiarity, "How do?" or "What cheer?" or even "Where are your digs?" Every sort of person whom we saw every day of our lives seemed to be going to the same destination. And every one of them seemed to glory infinitely in the fact that they were not alone. They were manifestly thrilled that they were part of a large, familiar herd just about to embark on

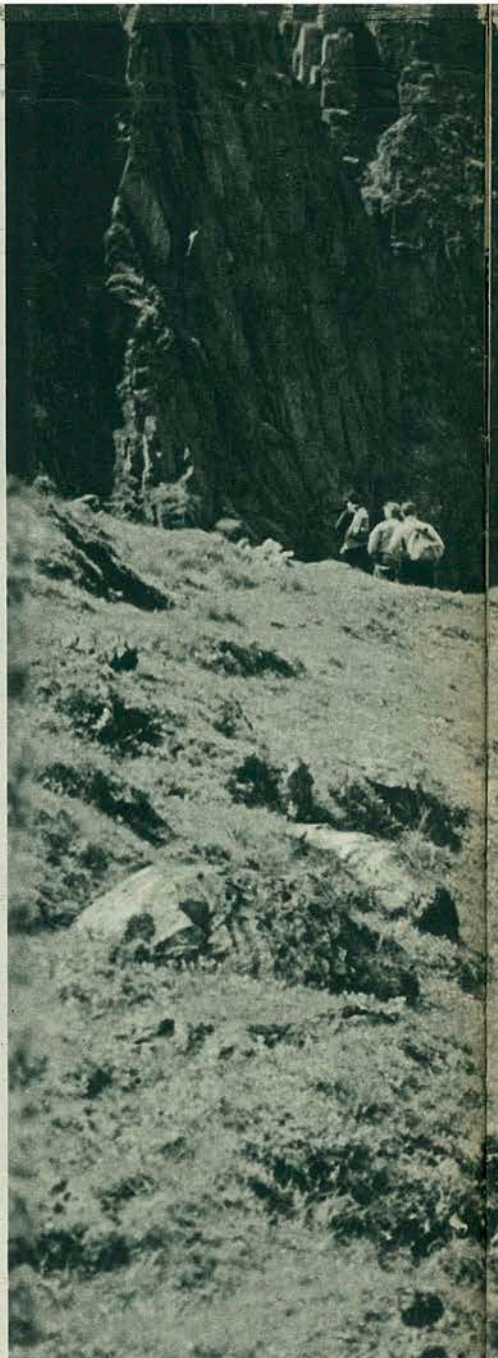




**Down Comes The Boat** to make a mighty splash and holidaymakers huddled together appear to be scared as they cover their faces. They're not. It is their way of getting the very last ounce of fun out of the day



**Down Comes The Corn** on the Sussex Downs and the harvest is good. The children are on holiday and each day brings its own discoveries, offered by fields full of sunshine. Over the horizon are crowded beaches



**High above the Cumberland valleys, holiday climbers**

a mass movement in search of new pastures.

There rose in me, that day, the first of many deep doubts about humanity. It grew deeper, as the holiday went on, and the years have made it deeper still. Unresolved, it fascinates me more and more as I see played out, every summer, the same drama of man's migration.

There lives in Scandinavia, as every reader knows, a species of small rodent known as the lemming. Every few years the number of lemmings grows so large that enormous quantities of them decide, for unfathomable reasons, to rush seaward and drown themselves. Whether in seaward migration the lemming is imitating man, or man is emulating the lemming, no one has yet discovered; but it has always seemed to me possible that a Martian scientist, studying the curious self-destructive habits of man on earth—in particular his irrepresible urge to blow himself to bits at frequent intervals—must ponder as deeply on the migration of car, coach and cycle to the sea as we in turn ponder on the inscrutable mystery of the lemming drowning itself. It could scarcely seem to him that the behaviour of one animal was any more curious than the other.





make their way up the east face of Pillar Rock. H. E. Bates asks: "What instinct activates the mountaineer . . . prepared to risk life and limb to seek solitude?"

Living as I do in the county of Kent, midway between London and the sea, where the countryside is more beautiful, more varied and more richly productive in its sheer lusciousness of fruit and flower than anywhere else in England, I am in an excellent position to observe this seaward exodus at first-hand. Every day of the summer a procession of bullet-like coaches—not a scrap less interesting than, and not at all unlike, the proposed rocket-coaches to the moon—rush thousands of passengers down to the sea. In July and August the exodus intensifies and reaches its height. The coaches, apparently driven by madmen with orders never to lose a second in the journey on pain of instant dismissal, rush coastward and back again on schedules more rigid than cosmic timetables.

At the sea man proceeds to disport himself. That is to say he does practically the same things as he does at home. He exchanges one set of rather comfortless conditions for another. He becomes one of a great herd sitting on sand or pebbles, watching the sea. The more of his fellow creatures that surround him in this simple but curious occupation, the better he likes it.

Coming from the congestion of cities, from conditions fiercely condemned by generations of social-minded orators as outrageous, he instantly re-creates these conditions in another place.

He joins queues for food and drink, eats from paper bags, sucks at bottles, prods with wooden spoons at synthetic ice-cream, gazes at the same multiple shops as he sees every day at home, exposes his body to the air, and so closely to that of his neighbour that if he had no more room to undress in Poplar or Pimlico, the orators of his class would point him out as a breeding ground for Communism and anarchical reform. Sometimes—who can say whether or not out of some deep instinctive despair of making any sense at all of life on earth?—he rushes into the sea and, like the lemming, drowns himself.

Behind him and on all sides of him, lies the countryside. What, I sometimes wonder, does he make of it? Coaches rush him forward on iron-bound schedules. Does he sometimes want to break through herd regimentation, club the driver over the head and yell, "For God's sake, stop!" impelled simply by some sudden and unpredictable instinct to drink in, for a moment,

the beauty rushing past him? I think not. The coach stops three miles on, at the Rose and Crown, and his destiny is prearranged.

With the herd he will stop, alight, drink and eat in exactly the same way as a herd of buffaloes stops at a water-course at nightfall. In the woods about him the owl begins to call as it called in Shakespeare's day; the nightingale is clamorous in bluebell copses; wild rose and honeysuckle or meadow-sweet fringe fields in which, on nights in deep summer, the corn itself is ripening with the same rich and timeless fragrance as it did in Egypt when Cleopatra was seducing Antony. Perhaps these things occasionally make themselves known, in the dimmest way, to his senses. But there is no time to touch or grasp them. The herd is going home.

Yet the herd migrates also to the country. The coaches divert themselves. Tours are planned; man makes the round trip. The schedules are eased a little and through the deep lanes of the south country, and that lovely hinterland of Kent, Sussex, Dorset, Hampshire and Devonshire, the procession of coloured coaches from London and the sea moves like a cortège. With stops

*Continued on page 35*



## HAVING A WONDERFUL TIME . . .—continued from page 11

at Winchester to look at the graves of kings, at Goodwood to look at the racecourse rather than the heavenly bosom of Sussex downland, at Battle to look at the abbey, at Salisbury to look at the cathedral, at beauty spot and birthplace, it carries the herd on the tour of things that must be seen.

Is man the most frightened animal on earth? I ask the question because fear, psychologists are fond of saying, governs every human action. It lies behind the changing dictates of a fashion (fear of being less mateable or desirable than other women); the buttonhole of the business man on the eight-thirty (fear of being less noticeable than other men); behind parental anxieties that children should be educated at the right schools (fear of a loss of social status). But the most curious fear, it seems to me, is man's fear of being alone; especially on holiday.

## Conducted Tour

His constant cry is to get away from it all, to escape from office, factory, shop, the drudgery of daily toil, the familiar dreariness of his fellow men—then, having escaped, he cannot bear his loneliness. He plays safe; in turn he seeks the protection of the herd. He joins his fellow lemmings rushing to the sea. He is infinitely comforted, as if he were in a wilderness, by the proximity of thousands of fellow animals about him. So encumbered, perhaps, he feels he can never drop sick or hurt unnoticed.

Take him on holiday abroad and this fear may well intensify to a mania for regimentation. Like a child he reaches out for the protection of that curious modern bodyguard, the Conducted Tour. Trains are reserved for him; he cannot by some ghastly mischance go to Rome when he meant to go to Brussels. He is herded with parties of fellow-prisoners at forbidding foreign stations. He is shepherded through the wilds of Interlaken and Versailles. He cannot go wrong, he cannot be thrilled or fooled or enriched or killed by adventure. His labels are secure and in God's good time the couriers will guide him home.

## Herd-minded

I do not want to give the impression here that everyone who takes a holiday, whether by sea or in the country or abroad, is necessarily herd-minded and herd-ruled, even though these things seem to be becoming more and more pronounced as phenomena of our times. Though removed from the bus-herd, the tour-herd and the seashore, lemmings are the equally curious creatures who, so far from hating loneliness, hunt alone. They are splendidly exemplified, to my mind, by those who climb mountains. What instinct activates the mountaineer? Is it any less an instinct than that which impels the lemming-humans in their herd-like summer rushes to the sea? I have never discovered. But quite clearly something remarkable is manifest when men are prepared to risk life and limb merely to seek the solitude of high places that their fellow men are unable to obtain.

Is it a desire for conquest? It is not quite an accident, I feel, that the few mountaineers I have met have been rather small men, slightly less than normal size, or diffident and unsuccessful in their approaches to women. Is it possible they must demonstrate themselves capable of

rising higher than the rest of us? Or that, being unable to make conquests of women, they must demonstrate their male capacities making conquests of mountains.

I can only guess, but the highly interesting phenomenon, so often noted on mountains, of climbers being accompanied in high places by a mysterious and watchful figure walking with them, is something that causes nice conjecture. It is just possible that that figure is their self-created audience, the eye watching what the rest of the world cannot see—the demonstration of individual conquest at last attained.

I have never been addicted to climbing mountains; and not for many years have I submitted myself to the oppressive experience of sitting on beaches crowded by portly ladies and gentlemen in bathing costumes, by young ladies of ripely disturbing form stretched out in sun-worship, by whelk-sellers and ice-cream sellers, to breathe that unique combination of nostalgic odours, sea-brine, fish and chips and sea-weed drying in hot suns. I prefer the country. This is not because I want to be, like mountaineers, alone, but because I want to escape from what is sometimes called the rush of modern civilization.

## Timeless Symbols

I rejoice simply in something which is timeless. To me it is a thing of infinite wonder that I share the delicious experience of "That Aprille with her showers sweete" with Chaucer, and the joy of drinking at the crowslip's bell with Shakespeare. When the sycamore breaks from long pearl-pink buds in spring or corn ripens in August, I get pleasure not simply from the beauty of the events themselves or from the fact that they are timeless symbols of spring and summer, but also from the more civilized thought that I share the experience with Virgil and a million countrymen, down countless centuries, from Alexandria to Aberdeen.

The simple process of planting seed in earth, of cutting grass to dry in the sun, of threshing seed from ripened stalks, of gathering fruit and berry, of enjoining the skill of human hands to the miraculous forces of earth's fertility, are things that do more than fascinate me. They appear to me to be the sources of much that is deepest, most pleasant or most satisfying on earth.

And they do more than that. They compensate me for the most cruel and frightening contradiction of our time—the fact that man, rushing ahead on the one hand with his scientific, atomic and lunatic discoveries, has been unable to adapt to them any kind of compensating moral stature. He creates power which he cannot use except in processes of self-destruction. He flies at supersonic speeds not with the object of being able to enjoy summer holidays in Tahiti when it is January in Tooting, but because he is afraid that some enemy, specified or unspecified, will fly at even greater speed and so destroy him. He speaks with scientific rationality of flying to the moon, and yet cannot fully feed himself on earth.

Perhaps—who knows?—and no less an authority than the great American humorist, James Thurber, has already suggested it—that is what, at some moment in their evolution, the lemmings did, and why they now rush down, as we do, to drown themselves in the sea. Or perhaps, as with us, it is just their notion of a holiday.



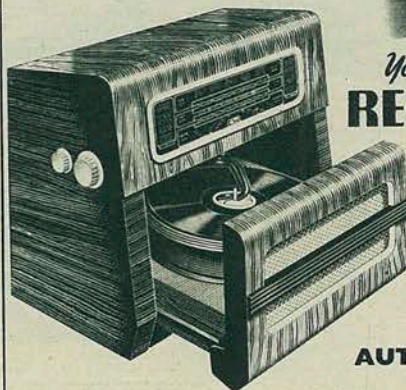
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couldn't  
conquer

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