

## ***A Personal Perspective from Galloway, South West Scotland***

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"DEAD" is what is says on the first page of this notebook. Richard wrote that sometime in April, along with "how old were the lesions?", "edge of 3km?" and "knock on door", underlined and re-traced. Notes from a phone call in mid crisis.

That fear which accompanied every phone call lasted for a month. We were lucky; our Form D was lifted at the end of May, though many friends were slaughtered out.

Our lives went upside down. I'm a rural onsultant, working from a homeoffice on our sheep farm. I found it hard to work effectively, spending hours glued to websites instead of writing my report. Hours on the phone to friends who were loosing their stock, in preference to phoning people in offices. The partnerships I work with cancelled AGMs. Projects did not start. Everything was postponed, trivial compared with the urgency of virus control. I washed and disinfected myself and my car every time I left the farm, didn't even sit down at the kitchen table with my 'clean clothes', for fear of invisible contamination. Who was dirty, who was clean? We avoided seeing other farming families, barricading ourselves in against the invisible menace.

I was angry every time somebody expressed an opinion without knowing the reality. We supported the cull, we knew it had to be done quickly, and we knew it would hurt. How dare these well-meaning people think they know the issues? They had only read about the disease from the papers and the net, a web of urban myths based on partial truths. They had no first hand experience of it.

The council erected large red and white signs: "Please avoid using minor roads if at all possible".

Our resident neighbours stopped walking. We trusted them absolutely; they understood that if one local farm got it, the whole south of the parish would be wiped out. We had closed the farmyard gate in early March, and strung bunting across the entrance of the house to deter callers. Blue and green plastic bags on some bailer-twine — anything except the dreaded red-and-white that meant death.

Our absentee neighbours had a sign erected on our shared access. "Due to foot and mouth - Walkers keep out". They phoned from Essex and Herefordshire asking to be kept informed.

I don't think there are any local rights of way, so locals walk on farm and forestry tracks. Everyone knows not to go through lambing fields in spring, but we also have a young plantation, jumping with roe deer. We wanted our neighbours to be able to walk there, but didn't want to spread disease or break the law. In the end, once our Form D was lifted, we rang the council and asked if we could re-open. They said yes, so we spread the word.

For a fortnight neighbours sprayed their feet (and their dogs paws) with disinfectant before and after their walks; then when our area was re-classified from "Infected" to "At Risk", we relaxed somewhat.

Now we wonder - shall we take down our absentee neighbours' sign?

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