



### Acts of God

As I write this it is sweltering and a life in waterproofs in the blazing sun seems crazy. We try and arrange jobs early in the day and I suppose if climate change accelerates, then we will have to consider a siesta.

Sooner or later the weather will break up, probably with some spectacular thunderstorms. Over the years we have been called to some suspected lightning strikes and we recently sat around swapping tales. Our role is to describe what we see and present the evidence to an insurance company.

It always helps us if the animals have not been moved. It may be tempting to tidy up the scene and transport the dead animals back to the farmstead, but this does you no favours when presenting a case to the insurer. One tale was of a bullock skinned and suspended from a loader tractor, partially dismembered in the farm buildings remote from the scene of death. Perhaps the strangest was from years ago when a client rang up to ask if we could check a bullock to see if it had died of anthrax. The vet agreed that if the farmer had his suspicions we should take samples. Dutifully he was driven out over the rough pasture to be presented with a yellowed patch of grass and a few black hairs, the bullock had died and been scavenged weeks before!

Some of these scenes are most distressing; I remember a large group of dairy cows dead around the base of a huge tree. They were gathered to shelter from the rain just outside the parlour before morning milking when the tree was struck, bark had been blown off as the sap expanded, and in addition to the dead, there were cows seriously injured that had to be destroyed. The loss of so many cows in a small closed herd forced the sudden purchase of several cows, with implications for the health of the herd for years to come.

As we approach the second anniversary of the Boscastle flood we can recall that although, miraculously, nobody died, livestock were swept away. Generally cows are good swimmers but if unable to climb the bank may become exhausted and drown. Sheep quickly drown because of the weight of water in their fleece.

Storms and flash floods can also have less obvious health effects. Autumn storms can bring down acorns in large numbers which when consumed have caused multiple deaths from poisoning. The flushing of stream banks may dislodge the tubers of waterdropwort or "dead man's fingers". Cattle seem to find these attractive to eat, which is unfortunate as they are very toxic. After a prolonged dry spell we can find cases of Salmonella as stagnant ditches are flushed out onto pasture.

So even our relatively benign climate has the potential to cause loss of livestock.