

Christmas eCard 2020 from Jim and Fiona in snowy Tarbrax.

Well 2020 has been a laugh hasn't it? I can only speak for myself, but actually it hasn't been too bad. It makes life more interesting with the occasional challenge, and things have certainly been turned around since March or thereabouts. Scotland's experience has been much the same as the rest of Europe except while it is usually a bit damper we have generally had pretty good weather and only recently dropped into autumn, albeit with a few inches of snow, so we can't complain. The Covid thing has cancelled some of my work load and replaced some of it, but generally there is less. Our charity is lucky enough to get money from the local wind-farms, so we can buy food for the village food banks, and that needs collecting, so my Tuesday mornings are used for that with the help of several other volunteers and staff. It gives me the excuse for driving around a bit too. In fact I make a slight profit as the electricity costs much less than the fuel payments provide.

Especially in summer when the electricity from the panels is largely free, days sadly now a dim memory.

Our significant, if short lived, snow-fall was early in December before we were expecting it, but a neighbour managed to get a photo while it transformed the village. All melted by the time of writing and I didn't get any real EV snow practice, and I shall consider winter tyres soon anyway. The car behaves much like an automatic but it'll be interesting to see how the regenerative braking works in snow.

The central (Ground Source) heating is working well, which is just as well as I just did a sort of power-point internet interview for the Green Homes Association extolling its virtues. Our rental house tenant seems happy with the air-source heating, this is its first winter, but I've not heard any complaints so far.

At home the cats still prefer a wood fire though, and sit pointedly near the stove, lit or not, in the evening. They may not be able to speak, but it doesn't stop them communicating effectively, and the gist is that radiators alone just aren't cutting it. Not that they should need either with those fur coats.

We've been keeping up to date with the virus and ways of dealing with it through a Dr John Campbell on you-tube. Sensible advice and information without any politics and enough medical knowledge to be able to explain, debunk and recommend appropriately. Slightly blunt toward people who don't follow the guidelines, but then they probably aren't listening anyway.

With a bit of luck we'll be able to see Mum around her birthday in March 2021, but we've been able to make a regular connection by using an internet chat thing called Houseparty. Fairly simple to operate and cheaper than the phone if you have unrestricted internet. My only problem in the area of communication is the sheer multiplicity of apps. Messenger, Messages, Facebook, Facetime, Houseparty, whatsapp, Zoom, Skype, Twitter, emails, text

messages and strange garbled messages on the answer-phone when a text turns up on the wrong phone line. Perhaps it is time somebody made some kind of aggregating software that dealt with all of it and put it all into one basket. It is my own fault though, I have a smart-phone with most of the apps as well as a desk-top, lap-top, tablet and half a dozen email addresses, so you can see where the challenge arises. Not helped by one of the cats working its way around the back of the computer as I type, but balanced by their trying to catch one of the CGI squirrels on the television.

Every two or three days, by way of exercise, we go for a walk to the top of the big bing by the village, and the wind seems to be rather cold of late although it is supposedly from the south-west. There's a good view of a significant number of wind-turbines glinting in the rather grey sky providing power and money and a mini turbine atop the bing itself charges the battery for the local internet dishes. Today it was flat out to the point of invisibility, which accounted for the chill around the ear-oles of yours truly.

Below, the image of our village Christmas tree while the snow was still there. Have a safe one.

Love from Jim and Fiona

