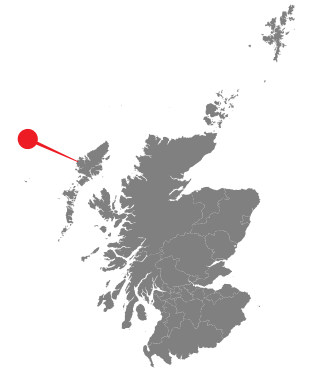# An unexpected afternoon on Carnish Beach

By Katie Macleod

We were about to turn around and drive back along the Uig road the way we'd come when we spotted the sign.

'Access to beach' was neatly painted on a piece of old wood, with an arrow pointing in the direction of what looked like someone's garden. There was a glimpse of tantalising teal-coloured ocean beyond the headland, but surely there wasn't a beach there — surely my family and I would have heard of it if there was?

Uig, a district in the south west of the Isle of Lewis, is one that for me holds golden summer memories. You know the type of memories I'm talking about: the ones where it is always perpetually sunny and warm, where the days and weeks seem endless, a never-ending parade of childhood adventures.

Those memories for me are of the summers my family and I would spend a week in a caravan at Reef beach, paddling in the sea, "fishing" for minnows with child-size nets bought at the community shop in Timsgarry, and collecting shells in our little plastic buckets. I thought we knew all the beaches in the area, having spent so much time here on childhood summer holidays and school trips, but the village of Carnish, it turned out, had a surprise for us.

Intrigued, we decided to park the car overlooking Ardroil Beach and walk back up towards the end of the road and the wooden sign, which seemed to be pointing in the opposite direction to any beach we could discern.

We passed through a gate, and followed a worn sheep track through the grass. It wasn't until we crested a small hill that the beach came into sight — and what a beach! A perfect crescent of white shell sand, protected by a small curve of a headland and smaller islands offshore, all lapped by the most beautiful blue-green water I'd ever seen. Even here in the Outer Hebrides, where beautiful beaches are ten-a-penny, Carnish Beach took me completely by surprise.

I ignored the fact that this was Scotland in summer, and the fact that blue skies do not guarantee warm temperatures, and immediately stripped down to my swimming costume to run into the sea. And would you believe it, while I was frolicking in the waves, a flock of oystercatchers — one of my favourite birds — flew over my head. I almost laughed at the perfection of it all. Prevented from travelling to the

Outer Hebrides for two years because of the pandemic, and on my return I was greeted with this? It felt meant-to-be.

As the afternoon wore on, a handful of other families arrived at the beach: children paddled, parents erected windbreakers (much needed, even in August), and a hardy individual or two went out on paddle boards. But on the whole, the beach was quiet — maybe because, like us, not that many people outside of the area knew it was waiting over the hill at the end of the road.

My family and I eventually headed back home to the other side of the island for our Sunday roast, but that afternoon on Carnish Beach has stayed with me.

Not just because of the beautiful sand, or the birds, or the cold-water swimming, but because of the novelty of finding somewhere new-to-me in a place I've lived in and known my whole life. It just goes to show that a little bit of curiosity and tapping into that adventurous spirit of childhood summers can bring unexpected results — and create even more golden memories to look back on, too.

An earlier version of this article was originally published on storiesmysuitcasecouldtell.com, the award-winning travel blog founded by Katie MacLeod, who was named one of Scotland's Top 100 Women in Tourism in 2020. Stories My Suitcase Could Tell inspires readers to travel at home and abroad, with a special focus on the Outer Hebrides, and has been featured in National Geographic Traveller, Buzzfeed, Cosmopolitan, and more.