

For the Alpkit blog: Alpkit Treasured Moments

By Jacquie Budd – Marketing Content Writer

Word count: 617

“Probably the best beach in the world.”

Reading the words written on the map, my husband and I knew we'd found our first stopping off point.

We were cycling the southern half of the Hebridean Way. But, as first time visitors to the Outer Hebrides, had asked family and friends for recommendations. The beach was on Watersay, the southernmost inhabited island which also happened to be the starting point of the Hebridean Way.

Perfect!

A few weeks later, we left the van in Oban to embark on a five-hour ferry crossing to Barra. Travel for the next two weeks would be via the miles in our legs.

Waiting to board, we immediately found ourselves part of a new and friendly community. Fellow bike packers gravitated together, swapping tales of adventure. Our excitement built as we wheeled the bikes onto the ferry. Then there was nothing to do but relax and look out for dolphins.

Later that evening, the ferry docked at Barra. With no pre-booked plans, we pointed our bikes towards Watersay, hoping to find a pub along the way. We soon realised our friends hadn't been exaggerating about the remoteness of the Outer Hebrides. Pubs, hotels, and shops were few and far between.

The road petered out at a farm on a peninsula, and it was decision time. Wild camp? Or cycle back to the ferry port in the hope of finding somewhere to stay? We could see tents and camper vans pitched overlooking a beach. But we knew the ‘*best beach*’ was on the opposite side. It seemed silly not to look while we were there.

And it was stunning!

Decision made we set up camp with the entire beach to ourselves. It was a perfect start to our Hebridean adventure.

The following day, we went exploring and came across a superb community café. Even better, it had free toilets and a shower for wild campers. We wondered, did this still class as wild camping?

Our location was so idyllic, we stayed a second night. But finally, we wrenched ourselves away and began travelling north.

During our travels we encountered the quirky airport café on Barra. Here you can sit in the departure lounge with a cup of tea and cake, watching planes landing on a tidal beach. On Eriskay, we learned about the intrepid islanders during wartime rationing. They 'rescued' whisky from a ship which had run aground, inspiring the film Whisky Galore. And we fell in love with the Uists, with their wild scenery and wonderful residents.

By the time we reached our most northerly point on Berneray, we'd caught the Hebridean Way bug. The temptation to buy a ferry ticket to Harris and finish the route was strong. But our scheduled crossing back to Oban was looming, so we turned away and began the journey south.

It was a sad day when we finally left the Uists, and more so when we boarded the Oban ferry for home. Our adventures had given us a good sense of bike packing set up, and the mileage we could achieve each day.

And we had a thirst to return to the Outer Hebrides.

The scenery was magnificent. But, without doubt, it was the people who made the trip extraordinary. Island residents were welcoming and car drivers friendly. And it was always enjoyable to spend an evening chatting with fellow adventurers.

In the spirit of swapping ideas, I'd spent the entire trip telling others about "the best beach in the world". Back home, I let the person know how helpful that snippet of information had been. She burst out laughing!

It hadn't been a recommendation, but simply the location of a Carlsberg advert "Probably the best...."

Words: Jacquie Budd

Pictures: Jason and Jacquie Budd

Jacquie is a freelance marketing content writer with a specialist interest in working with outdoor, purpose-driven, and eco brands. She's a member of the Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild and the Organisation for Responsible Businesses.

www.jacquiebudd.com

Instagram: @jbuddwrites

Link:

The Hebridean Way: <https://www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk/hebrideanway>