

Coastal STORIES

MAN ON A BEACH ASKS:
WHAT DOES THE BEACH MEAN TO YOU?

Words by **Yayeri van Baarsen**, photographs by **Mike Newman**

For me, it's some peace and quiet after a busy day in the office; a chance to let the wind blow away the cobwebs in my head as I stroll along the seaside. But it's also an opportunity to have fun, go rock pooling and run through the sand with my eyes closed while holding hands with my partner. For others, it might be a holiday, a place for leisure activities or a reminder of their childhood.

The beach has a different meaning to everyone. Under the pseudonym Man On A Beach, an anonymous Cornish resident asked hundreds of people the question: "What does the beach mean to you?" He then posted films of these narrative interviews on his website, thus creating a legacy of stories and memories.

Since the site appeared as CT's website of the month in January 2012, it has been viewed more than 100,000 times by people from 104 different countries. The project is a Cornish success story; economically viable and supported by 77 businesses, 50 of which are of this county. "Some things are meant to happen, and I believe this is one of them," the maker of the site explains when asked about his success. "I love doing what I do - it's a vocation. I have never had a master plan; the project just led me along. All I did was try to understand the effect of the beach."

I meet the mysterious film-maker on Porthbeor beach in the Roseland, one of his favourite sandy stretches in Cornwall. "Although," he says immediately, "I don't really have a favourite. The beach is never the same; circumstances, weather and tides change all the time. This permanent state of flux is what the beach means to me."

We park at the side of a narrow Roseland road. There is no sign whatsoever, apart from a little wooden plate saying 'footpath'. When we climb over the stile and make our way through a wet field, our shoes sink further in the mud with each step until the grass makes way for a slippery path of rocks leading down between the bushes. Suddenly, when the path turns around a corner, it's like being in a different world. The secluded, isolated cove of Porthbeor, with just a small stretch of sand visible due to the high tide, comes into view and -despite the weather being ▶

