

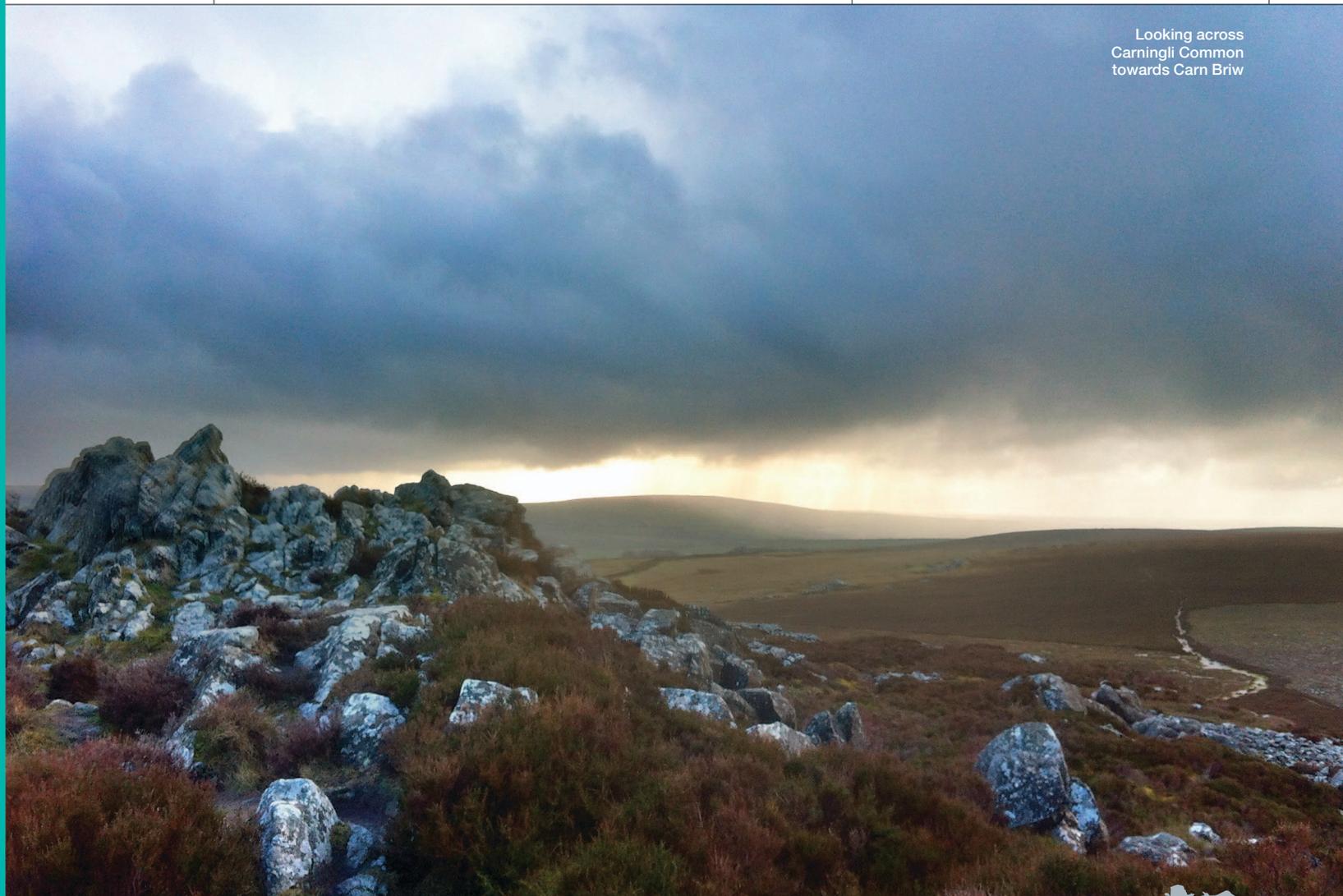
CARNINGLI AND CWM GWAUN
PEMBROKESHIRE

DISTANCE 18km/11 miles ASCENT 425m/1395ft TIME 5 hours

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Looking across
Carningli Common
towards Carn Briw



Historic exploration

Sarah Stirling steps back in time



DRIVING ALONG RIBBONS of green-edged country lane, I contemplated Carningli's legend: spend a night up there and you'll wake mad or a poet. Similar myths surround many mountain summits but, though Carningli has a fiery volcano-past, it's only 347m high. Just a hill. What could go wrong?

I parked on a balcony track carved around Carningli's hillside and stepped out, overlooking a panorama of tightly patch-worked fields seamed with darker hedgerows. Under the blazing sun, rain-gorged countryside shimmered with rich greens, buttery yellows and the rust of saturated, dying ferns. A black pony scampered about, peeking mischievously under a thick forelock.

I turned round. A wide grassy scar led straight up. Near the top, I hands-on scrambled over remnants of the volcano's dead heart: lichen-covered, dolerite scree.

From the rocky summit crown, I could see the sea lapping Carningli's northern skirt hem, with the golden scoop of Newport Sands and the green of Dinas Head jutting out.

Above me, a peregrine falcon was treading air. Walking along the ancient summit track I imagined people dressed in tunics and cloaks: Carningli last erupted around 450 million years ago, and had long been a haven for humans, even by the Iron Age (roughly 750BC to AD 43), when it was a hill fort.

Descending, I stepped further back in time, searching out Bronze Age hut remains in the heather. There wasn't a soul on the vast expanse of rock-strewn moorland over Carningli's gently-sloping back. Atmospheric indigo clouds were glowering in the distance. The sun shone brightly underneath, making a diagonal slant of rain glow violet.

A wet track glistened in the sun, highlighting the way across Carningli Common towards the tall, Bronze Age burial cairn, Carn Briw. As I splashed across the moorland, the clouds advanced and buckets of rain drenched me instantly. Map over head, I ran.

Then the sun shone through blindingly and the wind picked up, transforming the moorland. Waving grass tips glowed orange and sparkled through coats of rain. As I ducked behind the pile of rocks to check the map, the sky darkened and hail bounced viciously off my behind. I began to see why people could go mad or become poets on Carningli.

Emerging, I saw the clouds had cast a beautiful double rainbow into the sea. All was forgiven. I trotted over Mynydd Caregog's rounded back and continued towards the