

By

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BROWN



“Over the road ran a
Torrent”—the ford which
halted the convoy



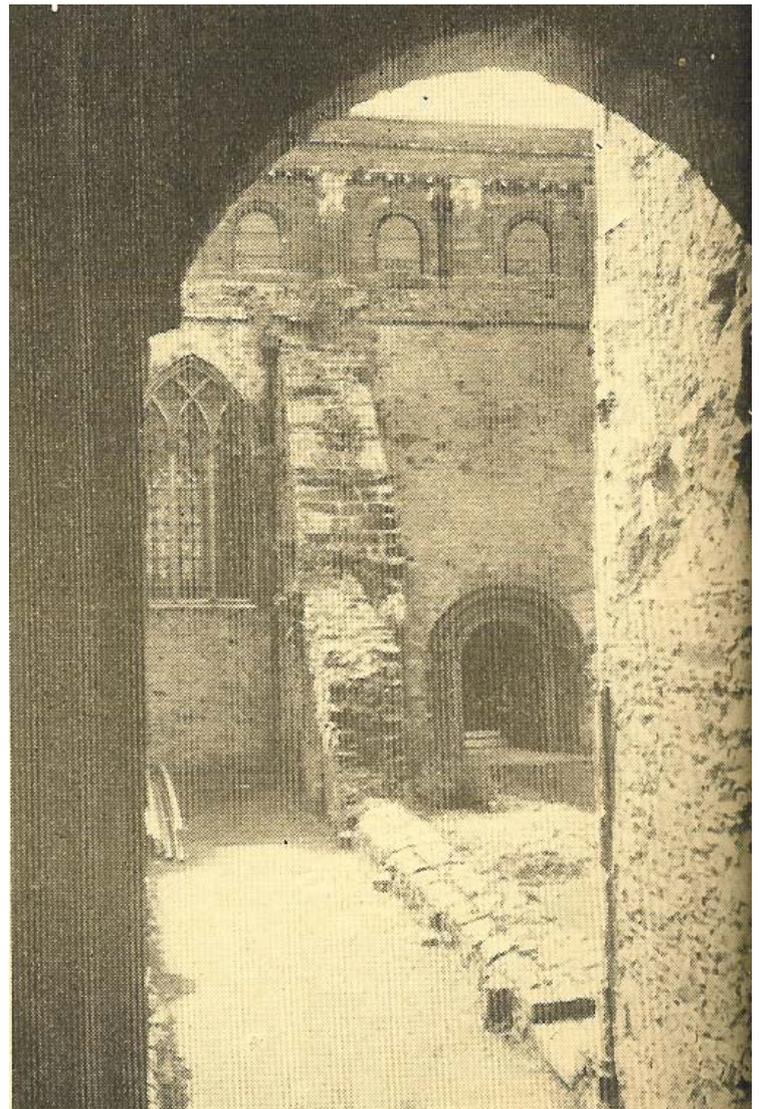
CARREG CENNEN

VOYAGE TO THE WEST OF WALES

IN HEAVY WEATHER

WHEN two ex-sailors and their wives go a—touring together, a certain amount of water is not out of place; two years ago (as recorded at the time) it rained for most of a Devonian excursion, and on Saturday, August 29, over an inch of rain fell in West Wales. Consequently the commodore’s green 1¼-litre M.G. threw up a wake that called for use of the storm ports on my 1½—litre Riley, next in station, as we left Abergavenny at sailing time, and the rain became heavier immediately, rendering unpleasant a brush with the enemy (a chivying policeman) in Brecon. The look—out had spotted some sausage rolls in a shop window, but the instant we stopped the policeman’s head was in the car. “You’ll have to go on to the car park, just along the road—” Brecon definition: “just along” —half a mile.

The full route is published within these pages, but ours was perforce abbreviated, mostly owing to weather but a little because of time. Yet that wet Saturday, by its very wildness, was able to give something to the scenery, and the commodore’s selection of items was cunningly devised to include those that would benefit from low grey cloud, a roaring sou’-westerly, and even rain. Thus the ascent of the Brecon Beacons on A470, up to the reservoir at the top, became memorable for the white cascades that tumbled down from the heights, and for the -great stains of Tyrian purple where the heather spread its autumn glory. After that there are pleasant narrow roads across to A4067, which provides another sou’-westerly crossing of the massif by Bwlch Brynn-rhudd (Bwlch, one recalls, means a pass). Such crossings, in such weather, have an exhilaration which summer softness cannot provide, and the sight of the River



Tawe at Ystradgynlais, surging, swirling and thundering down the valley, shot it through with anxiety, for the past year had seen much water damage: Lynmouth, the East Coast, Holland, Earth seems as if she is resenting the machinations of man, and the papers were still full of the Greek earthquake disaster, Once more we crossed the massif, this time to the nor'ard on A4069 over the western escarpment of the Black Mountain, and stopped for lunch in the cars where another torrent, the colour of tea and tortured into creamy froth, battered against a bridge.

It must be clearly understood that ships in convoy implicitly obey the orders of the commodore, so that although the Riley's crew were guilty of the omission to check their navigation they cannot be blamed for following the M.G. over the next tricky section without question; the commodore may, perhaps, be excused because there was no chance of getting a shot of the sun at midday, and because his compass (and mine) showed resolutely that our course lay west, as it was supposed to do. But a compass cannot show that you have inadvertently selected a route that is parallel to the correct one, a mile to the south'ard, and of a very much lower status as Ordnance Survey markings go.

The M.G. was scudding ahead, held up now and again by a gate, but with a foot of clearance on either side and daylight between the odd boulder and the chassis. I guessed that it could "go about" fairly easily at a dozen spots. The Riley, broader of beam, lower of freeboard and with a counter stern, was not going to be so happy under counter-marching orders. The track began to climb and the sodden



"A narrow tunnel, steeply descending"—the commodore supplies the ghost effect.

CONVOY

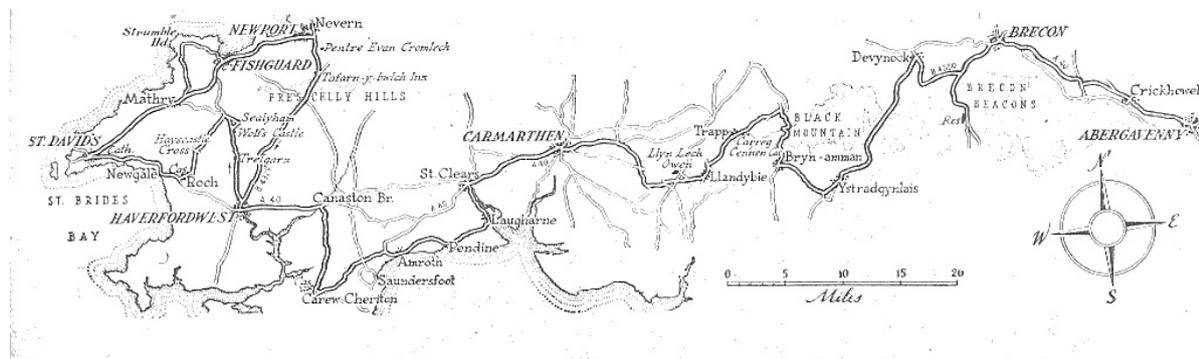
clouds became a damp and loathsome mist. Chances of turning round proved so few and far between that I gave up looking; we were again climbing that western escarpment of the Black Mountain, and, although all would have been harmless enough in summer weather, there was a threat in it this day. "We are all right at the stream," said the commodore reassuringly. "There's a bridge."

The cars climbed a little more steeply and then the road dropped into a gully, There was a bridge, but it was a footbridge. Over the road ran a torrent—one that neither the M.G. nor the Riley master mariner wished to navigate. Puzzled, we consulted the map, spread across the green bonnet of the M.G., while the rain came down softly, wettingly, adding to the volume of water that was coursing down from the mountain . . . and over our road.

After that, of course, it was easy to locate ourselves and the error, and we studied the situation as it applied to the about-turn of the low-slung Riley (whose lock is by no means exceptional). An attempt was made about a hundred

yards back, Mrs. Chief Officer having been jettisoned to allow the body to rise to the maximum on the springs. It failed owing to lack of ground clearance at the after end, the jacking extensions making contact, and the extrication from a beam-on position was not too easy under grabbing brakes (mist-wet) and an erratic clutch. Resigned, we rang down to the engine-room for full speed astern, and set off for more room and an inevitable crick in the neck. Fortunately we found it (the space) less than a quarter of a mile away, and were then subjected to the indignity of the M.G., coming along bow-first under a full head of steam, having nipped round in the space in which we failed.

It was pointed out to the commodore that his motives were suspect. This motorist having changed from a 1¼-litre M.G. to a 1½-litre Riley since the previous voyage there seemed room for the suspicion that the remaining M.G. owner wished to convince me that my choice was in error. However, we slithered merrily back to safety, overtaking another convoy when the road widened a little. This was composed of a tractor towing a van, the tractor being driven by a boy of less than ten years. Thoroughly skilfully, he



banked the machine at the first opportunity and edged the van in to let us pass and we were soon hull down on the horizon.

It was perhaps significant that the next road sign encountered read "Black Mountain Trapp"!

Casteil Carreg Cennen (three hard Cs) was reached at last. It lies five miles south—cast of Llandilo and is, fortunately, under the care of the Office of Works. Without that prosaic link I might well wonder if that fantastic ruin really exists, now that I am hack in London sitting in front of my typewriter. You must park your car and, in theory, pay a threepenny fee to climb the hill to the castle. In fact, our knocking only echoed through a locked and silent house. So we set off through the gate and up the green slope over which rolled the cloud—mist. The grey rock jutted through occasionally, the path spiralled with steepness; the rain's whisper was lost in the turbulence of the wind in high places.

High places? I looked up and felt a tingle of excitement. There, reaching upward through the, mist, were the gaunt remnants of the stronghold. Not much is known about it, and certainly on that day the mystery clung to it like the mist itself. It is 13th century, and British Museum manuscripts describe the site as the stronghold of Urien, Lord of Is-Cennen, who was one of King Arthur's knights. The rest is conjecture.

But its situation has nothing conjectural about it. You are puzzled by the notice appealing to visitors to do all in their power to avoid accidents—for just as long as it takes to walk over to the south-east side of the summit. You look over, and a surge of vertigo sets your heart pounding. There is nothing there. Vertically downward, though, can be seen the brown, white-flecked line of a torrent—the River Cennen—into which a pebble must travel 300ft to drop. You expect that sort of thing at Tintagel, and the Wye Valley is such a dizzy place that Chepstow Castle is probable, but here in West Wales the precipice is a horrifying surprise.

Eerie

To the left of your eagle stance a few stone steps lead to an iron gate, and beyond it the steps go on down. Water drips from the walls of rock that make a narrow tunnel steeply descending, with apertures on its right. A glance tells you where the tunnel leads—diagonally down the cliff, and through the apertures the dizzy drop-scene is repeated. We explored carefully, and after 150ft came to spiral steps surrounding a shaft at the bottom of which was a flicker of light, dreadfully far away. No wonder the notice implores visitors to take care to avoid accidents.

Upwards, the stone steps climb steeply through a needle's eye in one of the towers that will pass only the slim body, and then you are within the simple square fortress. A crafty restoration job is going on at Carreg Cennen Castle, and seeing it changes the imagined figure of a Minister of Works (blue suit, stiff white collar and bowler hat, surely) into a slim, stooping figure, white of hair and tall of forehead, with leather elbows and long white fingers carefully piecing together the potsherds of pre-history.

This was a tour of high spots, figuratively as well as actual, and on the Sunday we were to see Roch Castle, lived in and under the sunshine, but also magnificent of site. Roch, with its fuchsia-topped walls and an occupant shaking a rug out of the door, was the complete contrast to Carreg Cennen. Another high spot was dinner at the Mariners Hotel in Haverfordwest, where the homely atmosphere—a product of beams, nooks and, above all, nice staff—was an exactly right finish to a wet and wandering day. But on Sunday the clouds rode high, and the Pembroke lanes thrust pale green tongues of fern at the cars, the gorse glowed amongst the heather, the honeysuckle hung, all strawberries and cream, and the purple foxglove stood erect against a stiff westerly.

We saw St. David's Head, and Ramsey Island, and the rocks of Carreg-gafeiliog, Maen Cam and Gwahan. We saw Solva, an indentation of delight, and we made our pilgrimage to St. David's Cathedral. St. David's is a matter for books,

not for the casual mention in a touring article, and only one impression should be recorded. It is a strong one, yet is merely the fact that in all that giant cathedral there is hardly left a single architectural straight line, for St. David's was built on a shifting foundation. The fact that, in spite of all the movement, St. David's remains a living house of God is a magnificent tribute to the devotion of the Welsh throughout the centuries.

Once more the convoy climbed, this time over the Prescelly Hills towards Newcastle Emlyn, and then suddenly, at no more than a point on the map, it was dispersal time, The commodore headed south and the Riley east and the Sunday afternoon silence resumed its meditative aspect.

Dispersals were always like that. A flag fluttered, a convoy atomized, and only a slight sadness was left.



"Roch, with its fuchsia-topped walls . . . was the complete contrast."

FIRST DAY

ABERGVENNY to HAVERFORDWEST

	Miles
Abergvenny-Brecon, A40	20
Brecon to the Brecon Beacons (2,907ft) A470	9
Back along same road to junction with B4559	4
By B4559 to village of Devynock B4559	5
Devynock by Bwir Bryn-rhuddb (1,212ft) to Ystradglynlais A4067	16
Ystradglynlais to Bryn-ammenn (industrial) A4068	6
Bryn-ammenn over Black Mountain to valley of River Clydach A4069	6
Carreg Cennen Castle	5
Continue same road to village of Trapp	1
Llygad Llwhchwr ("The Eye of Loughor"), source of River Loughor	1½
which issues from cavern in hillside	
Drop anchor during lunch	73½
Trapp to Llandybie village	4
Llyn Llech-Owen - joining A476 from Llandeilo (the lake of Owens'	4
Stone - yellow water lilies grows)	
Llyn Llech-Owen to Carmarthen A48, B4310 and B4300	10
Carmarthen to Haverfordwest	44
Total	135½

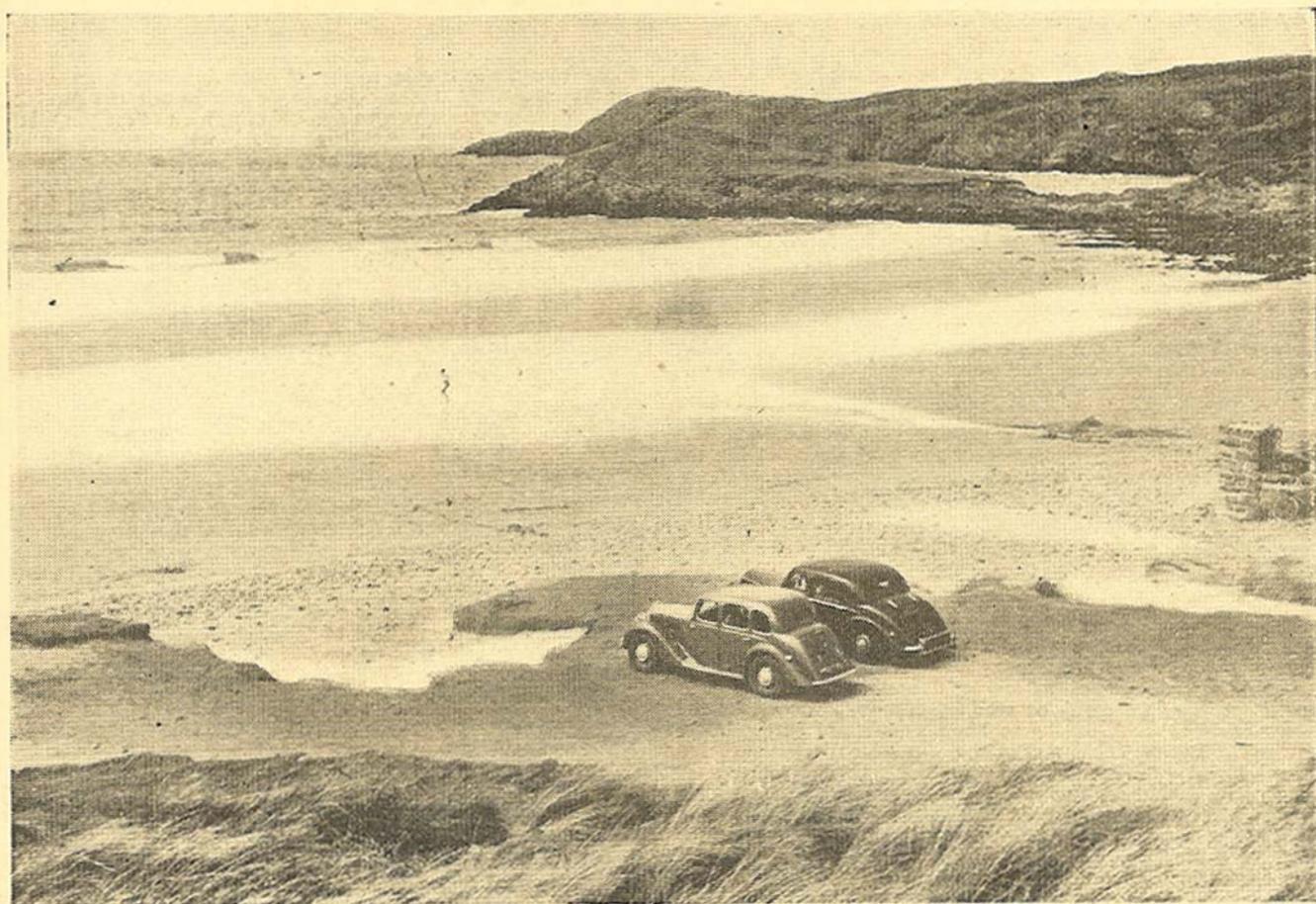
Carmarthen to Haverfordwest via St. Clears (A40). Along Pembroke road to the coast and Amroth Castle (now a hotel), whence view of sands and Saundersoot Bay across to Tenby. Then back to A477 (Pembroke) as far as Carew Castle and 9th century Cross, well situated on an inlet of Milford Haven. By A4075 northwards to A40 again a few miles from Haverfordwest.

SECOND DAY

HAVERFORDWEST to HAVERFORDWEST

Haverfordwest-Trefgarn Rocks - Wolf's Castle A40	7
Sallyham, A40	1
St. Lawrence - Hayscastle crossroads Roch Castle	8
Roch-St. David's by coast road by Newgale Sands Solva Cove, A487	8
Whitesand Bay (3) St. David's-Newport A487 (detour to Strumble Head 5m)	24
Newport-Nevern, A487	3
Nevern-Pentre Evan Cromlech	3
Thence join Cardigan road (B4329) at Tafarn-y-bwlch Inn, and over the Prescelly Hills (B4329)	16
	65

Total miles allowing for detours, approx. 200



Whitesand Bay, St. David's Head, Pembrokeshire. An article on this delightful touring area appeared in last week's issue.