

Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize 2021
Written entries 2021

I A path through time

A walker on the ridge alone
hears the faint bugle of a train
borne on the wind and smatter of rain
as warriors heard the blowing-stone

calling to Ashdown for the fight.
The road was old in Caesar's day,
not marching straight in the Roman way
but dancing on the open height;

watchful, the hill-forts hold the line.
The walker takes the downward track
(as enigmatic as chalk can be
when resonant with so much time)
with Uffington's rampart at his back,
for Liddington and Barbury.

II As well as over earth

Taking the chalk road from a day at home
locked down to a computer, I came late
to beeches sighing at the Smithy stones,
and just as night fell, to the hill-fort gate;

- a football thudded past me in the grass!
Families threw frisbees they could hardly see,
or trained their telescopes on clustered stars,
or sat on raincoats pouring flasks of tea -

along the moonless track to the car-park
were pipistrelles and serotines in flight
and glow-worms signalling their tiny hopes.

I left behind me, busy on the slopes
of earthworks buttressing the friendly dark,
a distanced people in the summer night.

*'It is impossible to get the feel of the Ridgeway without a constant
awareness of its path through time as well as over earth'.*

The Oldest Road by J R L Anderson

Barbara Payne
