

Siccar Point (from “Sushi & Chips”)

By Colin Will

Down step after step,
many of them stretching over-long,
red earth punctuates the tussocks,
places where other boots
sought purchase and a brief stance
on this steep green staircase.
I use these uncut treads,
braced by finger grip
on taut wire, between barbs.
I'm halfway down the cliff
when the first primroses peep,
a pale contrast to celandine's sulphur.
At the base is where
time was first found;
well, maybe not the second,
the lazy minute, absorbing hour,
or orbital year, but deep time,
the time it takes 'til all the seas gang dry'.
And this is where it happened,
where the curious Doctor dipped
into thought so new it had no name.
Given: Oceans beget waves,
waves beget beaches, and, maybe,
beaches beget sandstones, and, I guess,
sandstones form mountains under heat
and pressure from below,
and water wears down hills, and then...

.....

The gap, which was as long as he could think
and as many times doubled as two centuries
of discovery needs, the gap closes
with a rush of water-worn stones and mud,
and then...

.....

That sludge too turns to rock, over ages,
sitting prettily on the upturned edges
of a slaty stack, and then...

.....

Our friend sees it all exposed, not knowing
the size of time, but guessing it vaster,
endless, 'no vestige of a beginning,
no prospect of an end'.

This is the place he sketched,
the angle between strata as near ninety
as makes no difference, the time between
beyond any human counting, but now
a thing to be measured. Hutton's Unconformity,
far off the beaten track, and not signposted,
but known in places he would never see.

I touch the planed remains of folded mountains
formed from dried ocean's ooze, a docked strip
overlain by flash floods from a desert Scotland.

I try to remember
Silurian-Devonian timescales,
but it doesn't matter; I recognize
a Hutton-sized hiatus
when I see it