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## **At Wentworth Falls**

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## 205 SUMMER 2011

## AT WENTWORTH FALLS

For, and after, AR Ammons

Phillip Hall

I followed Darwin's Walk again this evening  
to the falls,  
from the ridgetop's open forest,  
contouring  
around the furrowed boughs of black ash  
and the smooth pale stands  
of peppermint and blue gum flaking  
over banksia, mountain devil and waratah:  
zigzagging

down to the over-  
cliff track where  
clumps of button grass  
and a holly-like grevillea blooms  
among the sedges of hanging swamps,  
soils like peat collecting  
along shales and sandstones,  
the sponged seepage zones  
of a fernery's rare collection:

along to the lookout at the falls:

a bush fire haze still burnt  
over the escarpment's western rim whilst drizzle  
swirled around the communication tower  
like a halo:

the forecasted change  
heralded  
to an alert line of towns  
threaded along the railway and Great Western Highway,  
the length of the Mountains' navigable central ridge,

the shape

of a wilderness' threatened destruction:

from the brink  
of the lookout's precipice, in Darwin's *grand  
amphitheatrical depression*, the drama  
unfolded  
and from this podium, I counted in  
the change,  
a swirling mist pouring over  
even as the volumes of smoke swept  
across the track,  
a catalyst  
like the secret stowed away on the *Beagle*,  
a pillar of cloud  
leading Darwin to his promised land,  
a sighting that laid bare our origins and opened eyes  
to change.

Phillip Hall is a wilderness expedition leader working with Indigenous kids to encourage school attendance and retention. He is also completing a Doctor of Creative Arts (poetry) at the University of Wollongong where he is researching the poetry of place from the perspective of postcolonialism and ecocriticism.

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