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A sure goal of the bush poet is to draw up our deepest sense of delight in the remembered moment. In a flash, that “Ah ha!” moment resonates with our own experience and takes us back to the crackle of the campfire, a shaft of sunlight over the Shoalhaven, the urgent rush of wind in the casuarinas. If that is indeed the goal, then the latest offering from our poet laureate, Tom Hayllar, has fulfilled it in spades with his new offering of poems, *Restless Leaves: Found Poems from the Back of Beyond*.

Delight skips from the pages as I read a range of sense impressions from Tom’s lifetime of walking, accompanied by colour photos, a number of them richly evocative of past good times in the Club.

In *Pond Life*, as Tom sits by the old dam marked “dry” on the map, ‘*needly with reeds and ploppy with frogs*’, day blends into night and a storm arrives. Above the thunder and lightning rage, but below in the pond:

*Still the green ones
ceaselessly haggle, bet and win and
gargle their love in throaty unheed
of the wrack above.*

On to *Light at the End of the Tunnel* on the Sandy Hollow Railway, where a short-cut through a 1km tunnel leaves Tom and his companions surprised by a train; they have to make a run for the emergency alcoves:

*Two mighty diesels
drivers way way up high;*

...

*spinning with screech
airless fear squeezed
into our niches beside us*

...

Then standing in the dim green sunlight

...

*As we looked at each other
coaly cutouts
black from head to foot – with soot.*

Haven’t we all been in a *Storm*, when:

*The ripening egg
Of the storm
Cracks over
Asgard Swamp ...?*

But I wasn’t with Tom when he saw the devastating effects of a fire in *Bushfire Blue*:

*Then in a burnt-out zone
We watched the house
Flaring its wealth skywards
In a twisting rosary of ruby dreams.*

There are a number of beautifully evocative poems about the Snowies, including *Cascade Hut*:

*As I walk over the spur
the morning light
flows through the trees
like twists of honey with a
cool, snowy breeze*

...

*a march fly curves
through the open door
revs over three shelves of mattresses then
banks, zooms and whirls*

BOOK REVIEW

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*in a little dervish of ash
in the fireplace*

Whereas at *Tin Hut in the Snowies*:
*the moon is up and running free
through clouds.*

Despite the book's name, when I put it down I was suffused with a Zen-like sense of stillness, as if a series of sublime bushwalking moments, free of mental buzz and noise, had appeared as photographic slides in my mind's eye. On a day when your bad knee or pressing urban commitments prevent you from getting out into the bush, Tom's book will fill the empty hole of longing.

BOOK REVIEW

(Continued)

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