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Finding raptors

We struggled over a wooded hill on the Murrumbidgee River. The afternoon was hot now without any wind, and David Mallinson stopped to look through binoculars.

‘I remember it as being just over there’, he said.

We glassed the opposite hillside but couldn’t see anything.

Some years later, close to where we were walking, David discovered a new plant species, the Tuggeranong Lignum *Muehlenbeckia tuggeranong* known only from flood terraces on the eastern bank of the Murrumbidgee River. But today we were searching for eagles. Rocks crunched underfoot and we pushed branches aside as we searched for the signs – eagle feathers, stripes of whitewash on the ground, pieces of rabbit or kangaroo, and listened for mobbing currawongs or ravens, the enemies of eagles. This Wedge-tailed Eagle nest was one of the few left around Canberra in 1985 since the construction of houses and walking trails had disturbed many pairs. Leopold and Wolfe (1970) had mapped the nests they found in Canberra, on Gungahlin Hill, Mt Wanniassa, but these nests were all abandoned by 1985. The year before, this pair had two young, but we stood under the old nest on the Canberra bank of the river and could see no whitewash under the tree. Because eagles often build several nests in their home range and switch nests from year to year, there probably were other nests across the river, or maybe some on this side hidden by forest. We pushed through tea-tree, solid as a thicket, under branches and between trees. As we struggled up a steep ridge we started to wonder if the eagles had taken a year off.