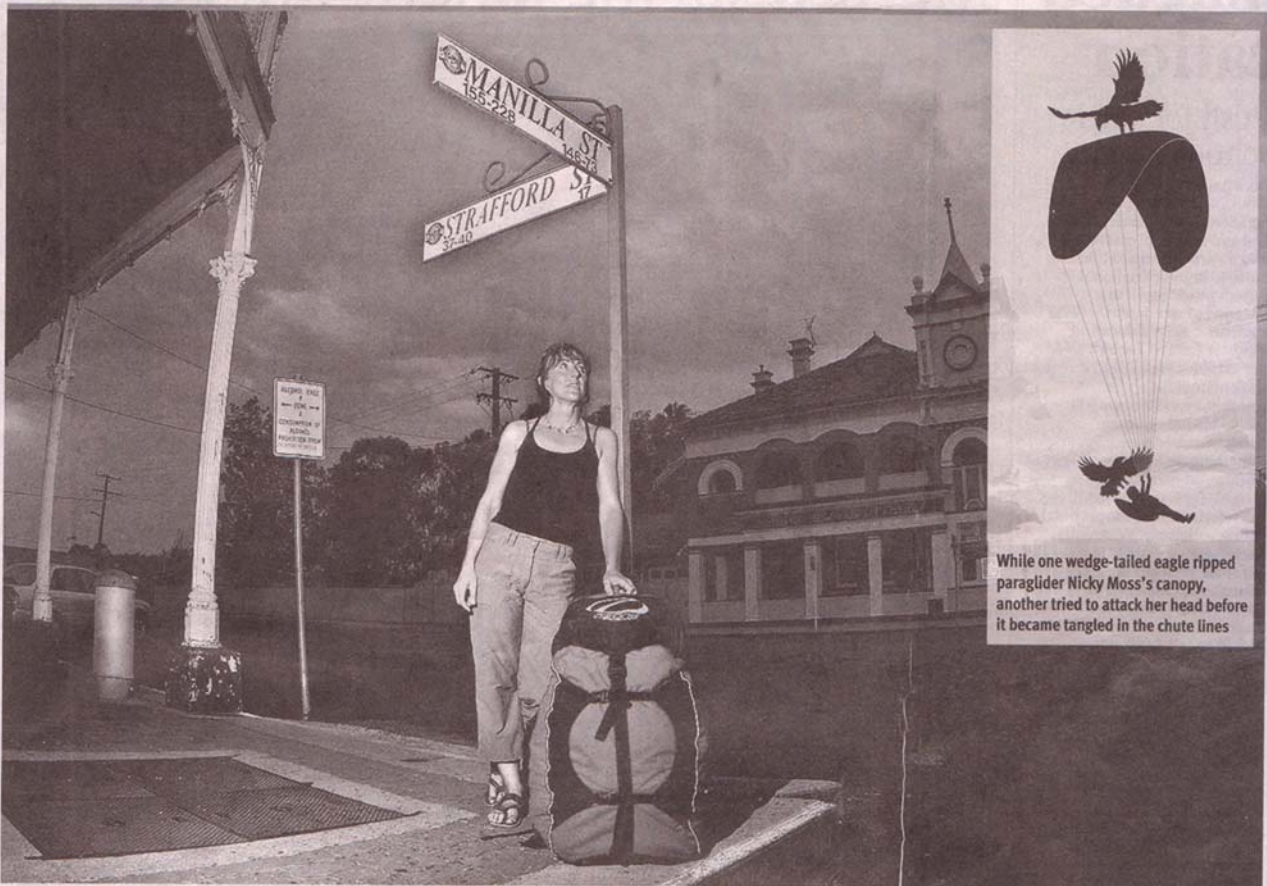


# Paraglider survives eagles' greatest hits



While one wedge-tailed eagle ripped paraglider Nicky Moss's canopy, another tried to attack her head before it became tangled in the chute lines

'Horror movie': Nicky Moss in Manilla, near Tamworth in NSW, last night after surviving an attack by eagles while paragliding

Picture: Peter Lorime

## James Madden

WHAT do you do when you're paragliding at 2500m and two huge, angry wedge-tailed eagles launch a sustained attack on you and your chute?

You scream and hope for the best, according to Britain's top female paraglider Nicky Moss, who this week survived such a terrifying ordeal during a jump near Warwick, 160km southwest of Brisbane.

Moss, 38, was only minutes into a training glide on Monday afternoon when the eagles, each with a wingspan of two metres,

began shredding her chute with their talons.

Moss told *The Australian* that she screamed at the "screeching" eagles as they repeatedly swooped within metres of her. "It was like something out of a horror movie," she said.

One of the birds flew into the back of her helmet — "I felt like I'd been hit by a freight train" — and the other became entangled in the lines of the paraglider. Moss went into a dangerous freefall, forcing her to prepare to release her reserve chute.

"It was frightening. The birds just kept dive-bombing my chute,

and were ripping it apart," she said. "And when one of them got tangled up in the lines I began to drop, and I thought to myself, 'this is a bit too exciting'."

Fortunately, the trapped bird managed to free itself from the lines and Moss did not need to use her reserve chute.

Moss said the eagles flew close until she was 100m above the ground, "by which time I think they were satisfied that I was leaving their space".

Moss, from Loughborough in England's Midlands, said reports in the British press that the eagles had tried to "claw her eyes out"

during her descent were untrue. She escaped without injury, although she admitted it was a terrifying experience: "They are the most strikingly beautiful birds, and many times in the past they have flown alongside my chute without attacking. But I guess on this occasion, these two just got a bit territorial."

Raptor expert Greg Czechura said wedge-tailed eagles would always defend their turf if they felt it was being encroached upon. "Think of it as a military exclusion zone. If you intrude once, you'll get a warning; if you don't heed the warning, they will

shoot you down," he said. "The 'wedgies' don't distinguish between human and non-human. They would have simply viewed the paraglider as a threat to them and their young, in the same way they would look upon another bird of prey as an interloper."

The drama was not the first for Moss in Australia. Last year she crashed into a gum tree at Bright, in rural Victoria, after striking turbulence.

Moss is a member of the British team that will compete in the world paragliding championships at Manilla, northern NSW, at the end of the month.