



Text by Simon Pridmore

Getting back into diving after a break is something a lot of us will be doing soon, as pandemic restrictions lift. At least, we hope so. This is the story of one diver's experience of returning to the sport—although, in his case, he had been out of the water for 20 years!

Jim first learnt to dive in his twenties. He then went to live on a tropical island for a couple of years and spent most of his weekends scuba diving. He did some technical diving courses and made a couple of long dive trips to exotic dive destinations. He was a diver and could not imagine ever not being a diver.

Then, life and work responsibilities intervened. He became a father and the primary wage earner, and those roles took priority. He no longer had time to dive. His equipment was packed away, but each time the family moved house, it came with them. Jim was still a diver after all. He did not dive anymore, but one day he would.

Twenty years later, his work/leisure balance had changed again and, out of the blue, a friend from his old diving days contacted him.



Just Like
Riding a Bike
— Diving After a Break

G SYMES/ PHOTO ILLUSTRATION COMPILED WITH PIXABAY IMAGES

"Hey Jim," he said, "we are heading out to do some diving in northeastern Indonesia in a few months' time. Do you want to join us?"

Jim asked if he could think about it. This was diving in a remote destination. They would be doing over 30 dives in a 10-day trip. It had been two decades since he

had been in the water.

Would he still remember how to dive? Would his old equipment hold up? Might the diving be too challenging for him? Would the other divers all be experts? Would he hold them back or make a fool of himself?

On the other hand, this was a great

chance to get back into a sport he had loved. If he did not seize the opportunity now, maybe he would never dive again, and it would always just be something he used to do.

He called his friend back.
"I'm in!"

Getting ready

He dug his gear out of the cupboard. It all looked in good shape, but he thought he had better take it in to a local dive centre and get it looked at by experts. While he was there, he asked if he could do a scuba refresher, to remind himself of the basic skills.



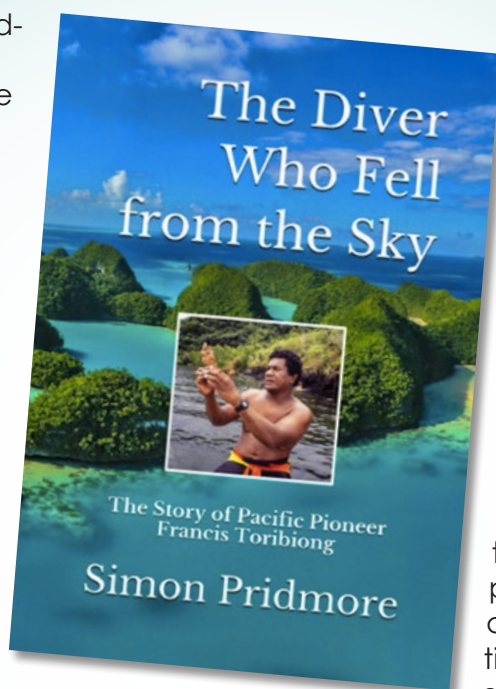


The refresher went well and his equipment was tested and passed as fit for purpose once a few o-rings had been replaced. The only casualty was his mask. The rubber had deteriorated over the years, and it leaked the moment he put his face in the water. He needed a

new one. His computer did not look out-of-date, compared to the new models on display in the shop, which surprised him. But he compared his sorry-looking old wetsuit with the ones hanging on the rack and decided that a new suit might be a smart investment.

A New Book from Simon Pridmore

When his country needed him most, Palauan Francis Toribiong came along and helped the Pacific island nation find its place in the world and become an independent, forward-looking 20th century state. And he achieved this, improbably, via the sport of scuba diving. This is the inspiring tale of an absolutely unique life, written by Simon Pridmore and illustrated with images of the beautiful islands of Palau, above and below the water.



him this title, people were speaking both literally and figuratively.

Toribiong was so completely different from all of his contemporaries in terms of his demeanor, his ambitions and his vision, that it was as if he had come from outer space. Palau had never seen anybody quite like him and there was no historical precedent for what he did. He had no operations manual to consult and no examples to follow. He wrote his own life.

Toribiong was born poor, had no academic leanings and no talent for diplomacy. Yet he was driven to succeed by a combination of duty, faith, a deep-seated determination to do the right thing and an absolute refusal ever to compromise his values. And, as well as all that, he was Palau's first ever parachutist—known by islanders as “the Palauan who fell from the sky.” In giving

Toribiong was the first Palauan ever to seek and seize the international narrative. No Palauan, in any context or field, had previously thought to go out into the world and say: “This is Palau—what we have is wonderful. Come and see!” This is his astonishing story.

Available in paperback or ebook on: **Amazon, Apple, GooglePlay and Kobo**



ENRICO STROCCHI / FLICKR / CC BY-SA 2.0

The trip

After four flights and 24 hours either in the air or in airport transit, he met up with his old friend and their fellow divers in Sorong, the gateway to the diving Disneyland of Raja Ampat. The divemaster watched them all unpack their gear and handed out forms. Here was the point at which Jim would have to reveal his lack of recent experience. He wondered if he would be put on some sort of special watch or separated from the group, at least at the beginning.

The divemaster did not seem to find Jim's diving resume at all unusual, however. He just commented that there had been a “bit of a gap” since Jim's last dive but seemed very happy to hear that Jim had done a recent refresher. They discussed weighting and the divemaster recommended that Jim wear a little

more than he had carried on his last dive all those years ago, to compensate for the new suit, an understandable anxiety and any additional “bioprene” he might have taken on over the years.

Jim immediately felt accepted and comfortable. He was not being treated like a freak or an outsider. He listened in on other divers' “interviews” and they were being asked very similar questions. Even divers with much more recent experience were uncertain about how much weight they needed.

Day One

On Day One, Jim back-rolled into his first dive of the day, deflated his BCD and exhaled. Nothing happened. He found himself stranded alone on the surface. Everyone else was gone. He dipped his head and looked down. There they all

were, dropping down effortlessly to the seabed.

Dammit! His earlier fears that he would not be able to do this thing returned. Fortunately, he was not completely alone. The crewman had manoeuvred the tender boat over and was standing above him, holding two dive weights out. He handed them to Jim.

“One in each pocket. You'll be OK.”

Jim did as instructed, looked up at the crewman, gave him an OK signal and a thumbs-down—he did remember some of the etiquette—and made another attempt to descend. Fins pointing down, left arm in the air, thumb on the deflator button. He took a deep breath from his regulator, then exhaled fully.

And down he went. Success! A little too much success, in fact. He was dropping like a brick. He felt pressure in his



opinion



GRACE COURBIS / FLICKR / CC BY 2.0

ears and the old instincts just kicked in. He equalised and added a little air to his BCD to reduce his descent speed. Then he looked down, found his group just below him, exchanged an OK signal with the guide and then just followed along.

After the dive, there was the usual banter.

"Good dive?"

"Great dive!"

"So many fish!"

Nobody mentioned Jim's false start; indeed, he got the impression that the guide was the only one who had noticed. The others had just been focussed on themselves. All Jim could think was, "What was I worried about?" and "Why did I wait so long?"

Air consumption

He had run low on air before the

planned hour was up but one of his fellow divers had run low on air too, so they had ascended together. Even with an almost empty cylinder, he still had plenty of air in his BCD during the safety stop, which he suspected was a sign that he was now carrying too much weight. Before the next dive, he removed one of the extra weights he had been given and managed to descend without any difficulty... and not so fast this time.

Throughout the day, he found he still used up his air faster than the others but tried to compensate for this and extend his dive time, for example, by staying a little shallower when they were swimming along a reef wall.

That evening, he was flicking through a dive magazine, and he came across an article entitled "The Art of Conservation." He read it and followed the advice. Very

soon, his air consumption issues were a thing of the past, and he was coming up at the end of a dive together with the other divers in his group and still with plenty of air in his cylinder.

Gear failure

As those of you familiar with Murphy's Law might expect, just as Jim began to feel completely comfortable, disaster struck. He surfaced at the end of a night dive, pressed his inflator button and all he heard was air escaping past his ear. He could not make himself positively buoyant and had to kick hard to keep his head above water. Fortunately, the tender boat was nearby, the crewman saw him in difficulty and told him to pass up his weight belt. Once he got rid of that, Jim found he could float easily even without any air in his BCD.

Back on the liveaboard, he found that the shoulder valve on his BCD had cracked. That was where all the air was escaping from. At first, he thought that it was the hard plastic fitting that had broken but, as he picked away at the crack, the "plastic" started flaking away in his hand. What he had taken for plastic was in fact a fat layer of glue that held the fitting in place and was now disintegrating.

The passage of time had taken its toll on his old BCD, and it was now unusable. It could be repaired, but not on the boat. So, Jim borrowed one of the boat's rental BCDs. This, of course, meant that he had to start from scratch again as far as getting his weighting right was concerned. But it did not take him long to get it sorted out.

After every dive, he would return to the boat, smiling from ear to ear. His old friend came up to him after one particularly outstanding dive.

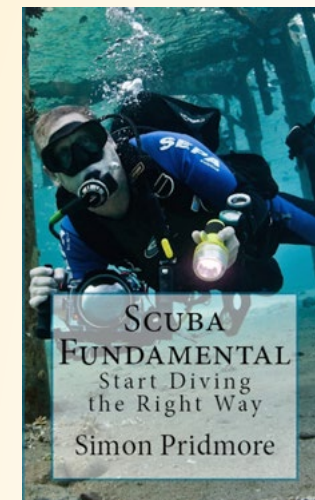
"So, how's it going, then?"

"Just like riding a bike," said Jim. ■

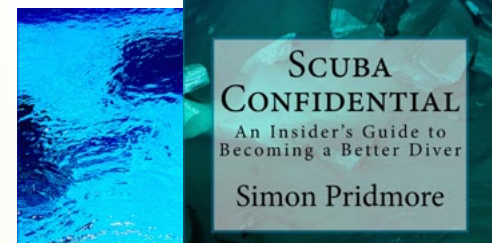
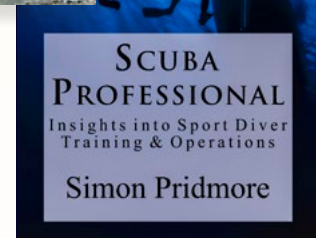
Simon Pridmore is the author of the international bestsellers Scuba Confidential: An Insider's Guide to Becoming a Better Diver, Scuba Professional: Insights into Sport Diver Training & Operations and Scuba Fundamental: Start Diving the Right Way. He is also the co-author of the Diving & Snorkeling Guide to Bali and the Diving & Snorkeling Guide to Raja Ampat & Northeast Indonesia. His most recent published books include The Diver Who Fell From The Sky, Dive into Taiwan, Scuba Exceptional: Become the Best Diver You Can Be, Scuba Physiological: Think You Know All About Scuba Medicine? Think Again! and the Dining with Divers series of cookbooks. For more information, see his website at: SimonPridmore.com.

Get the series!

Essential books by Simon Pridmore that no diver should be without.



Available as paperback, ebook or audiobook at Amazon, Audible and iTunes.



Buy it today! Click on each book cover to go to its order page.



Learn more! Visit the author's website at:

SimonPridmore.com

