



Interview with
Jakub Šimánek
— “I get to play at work and call it my job”



Text edited by Nikola Valtosova
Photos by Miloslav Dvoracek, Eva Simankova, Martin Štrmiska, Dusan Urban and Dan Valek

Jakub Šimánek lives for diving and dives for a living. He inherited his passion for the underwater world from his father at a young age. Currently, a Factory Instructor Trainer for the Liberty closed circuit rebreather (CCR), Jakub has been a part of the development team at the dive equipment manufacturer Divesoft since 2012. While his main focus is Liberty CCR and Liberty Sidemount training, he also works as a dive analyst, consultant, test diver and “crash test dummy.”

He has been diving with a Liberty since the very first prototype and has helped with many SW and HW innovations (CCR bailout mode included). Since 2017, he

Jakub Šimánek diving the flooded Czech iron mine of Hranicna

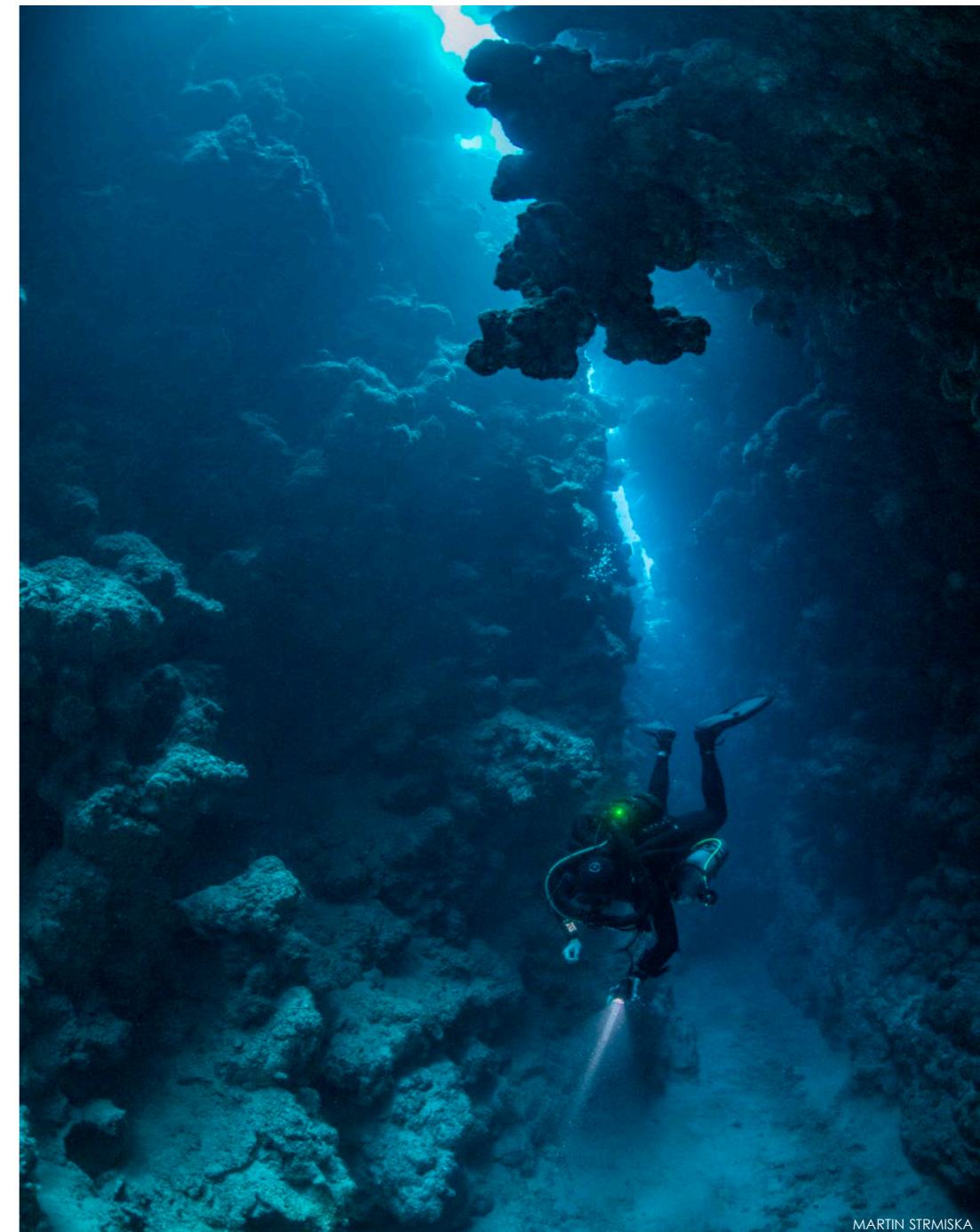
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DUSAN URBAN



MARTIN STRMIŠKA

Jakub Šimánek diving the flooded Czech iron mine of Hranicna (above) and in Egypt (right)

has been collecting and recording his experiences and methods using bailout rebreathers. In addition to obtaining a master's degree in education, Jakub has developed a rebreather training program and trains instructors, trainers and divers from all around the world, military included.

NV: We heard the story about how you got into diving is very interesting. How did your passion for diving come to be?

JS: My passion for diving began as soon as I was able to walk and talk. My dad was my hero, emerging from the mysterious depths below, and I wanted to

be just like him. I was drawn to the magic of the unknown world that my dad described to me in vivid detail. As a three-year-old, I often pretended I was a diver, playing under restaurant tables or under bus seats en route to Yugoslavia to entertain those around. I saw every puddle as a lake or sea that I imagined diving into.

NV: What do you enjoy most about diving?

JS: Of course, there are many things I love about diving: the underwater life, beautiful scenery, crystal-clear waters and the simple feeling of floating in a three-dimensional space like you

are flying. I also enjoy trying different types of dives that give me the opportunity to learn something new.

NV: Taking into account your many years of experience, I would say it is safe to assume you have found the place you like to dive most. Would you be willing to reveal its location to us?

JS: I have had the opportunity to dive in many places and have seen wonderful things in Australia, the Red Sea, Florida, the Mediterranean Sea, the Hranice Abyss and even the Danube Delta. So, it is quite hard to say where the best dive was or where

the best place is, but there is one spot that is really special to me in many ways. It is a flooded city in a reservoir, which was originally designed to hold drinking water. Diving is forbidden there, of course, but I managed to get in the water several times and was the first to discover the flooded remains of a castle as well as a perfectly preserved Jewish cemetery. Diving there was a real adventure and was the culmination of many hours of careful planning and searching old maps and archives.

My other favorite place is my "home reef," the Borek quarry, where I have logged hundreds of dives and still enjoy going to today.





MILOSLAV DVORACEK

Jakub Šimánek diving the flooded iron mine of Hranicna in the Czech Republic

NV: When did you decide this hobby of yours would also become your career?

JS: Of course, I had always dreamed of diving becoming my career, and when I look back, it seems that everything I did in my life was actually in preparation for what I am doing now. All these paths came together in one place and at one moment when I met Lucie Šmejkalová (CEO and co-founder of Divesoft) and decided to cooperate with Divesoft. It might seem like a coincidence, but, as I do not believe in them, I am not sure it was.

NV: You are not only a diver, but you also do consulting, analyses

and new product testing. Could you tell us something more about these other activities you are involved in?

JS: Being as diving is my lifelong passion, and perhaps even my lifestyle, I sometimes feel a bit silly that I actually get to play at work and call it "my job." I love thinking of new ways and solutions for diving gear, instruments, techniques and training.

NV: In your bio section on the Divesoft website, readers can learn about how you developed the rebreather training program. Why did you decide to specialize in the rebreather?

JS: I have been interested in rebreathers since I first learned about them during my first official CMAS* diver course. At that time, I overwhelmed my instructor with a ton of questions that he could not answer, because he only had a theoretical knowledge of rebreathers. In those days, few people had ever had the opportunity to even try a rebreather. When the Dräger Dolphin appeared on the market, I was blown away and wanted to create one of my own!

NV: What is so special about this type of diving technology?

JS: I have always liked the efficiency of the gas consumption; the absence of bubbles allows the

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diver to better blend in with their environment and this opens the possibilities of staying underwater longer and descending to greater depths. Overall, I just really like the whole principle of the CCR.

NV: In addition to your courses, do you have the option to train others in diving? Who are your typical clients?

JS: Unfortunately, I do not have much time left for courses outside of Divesoft. My clients are mainly rebreather instructors and instructor trainers from all over the world. And if anybody has managed to convince me to teach another course, it is usually my friends.

NV: Your work schedule is truly multi-colored. We heard that you will also be taking part in the TekDive 2020 Conference. What exactly will this event be focused on? What should the conference attendees be looking forward to the most?

JS: TekDive USA is always full of interesting presentations and speeches about technical diving, physiology, new technologies and intriguing projects. I definitely want to visit presentations by Neal Pollock, Frauke Tillmans, Gareth Lock and Rick Stanton.

NV: You have also been asked to speak at TekDive. Have you already selected

the topic you will speak about at the event?

JS: Yes, I will be part of a panel discussion on bailout rebreathers. This is a very hot topic because this trend, which until recently, was limited to just a handful of individuals, has infiltrated the general diving community thanks to the Liberty Sidemount. This way of diving is still in its infancy, so I would like to use my experiences and knowledge to help educate others on safe diving practices using bailout devices.

NV: In closing, I would like to ask you about your vision, dreams and plans for diving. Is there anything specific you

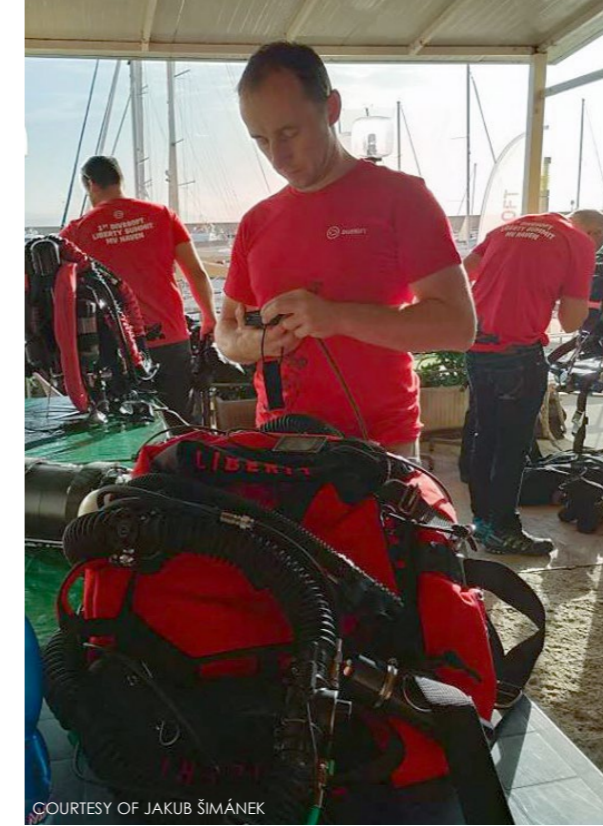
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to make rebreathers even more effective, more user-friendly, powerful and safe. But these are just ideas on paper, and without all the other wonderful members of our team, they will just stay that way.

NV: Do you have any motivational advice, which has helped you achieve your diving goals, to share with our readers who love diving as much as you do?

JS: I do not think there is anything that can replace one's internal motivation, but if I was to advise others, then I would say: "If you love diving, get as much information as possible from all the areas it touches and let that propel you forward, not only with regard to your diving skills, but also towards a more enriching life." ■

Nikola Valtosova is a dive and travel writer and project manager based in Prague.



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would like to fulfil in the coming years?

JS: I would like to continue to participate in the development of dive gear. For example, in my head are ideas on how



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Šimánek diving in Egypt (above and top left) and checking gear as an instructor trainer (top right)