

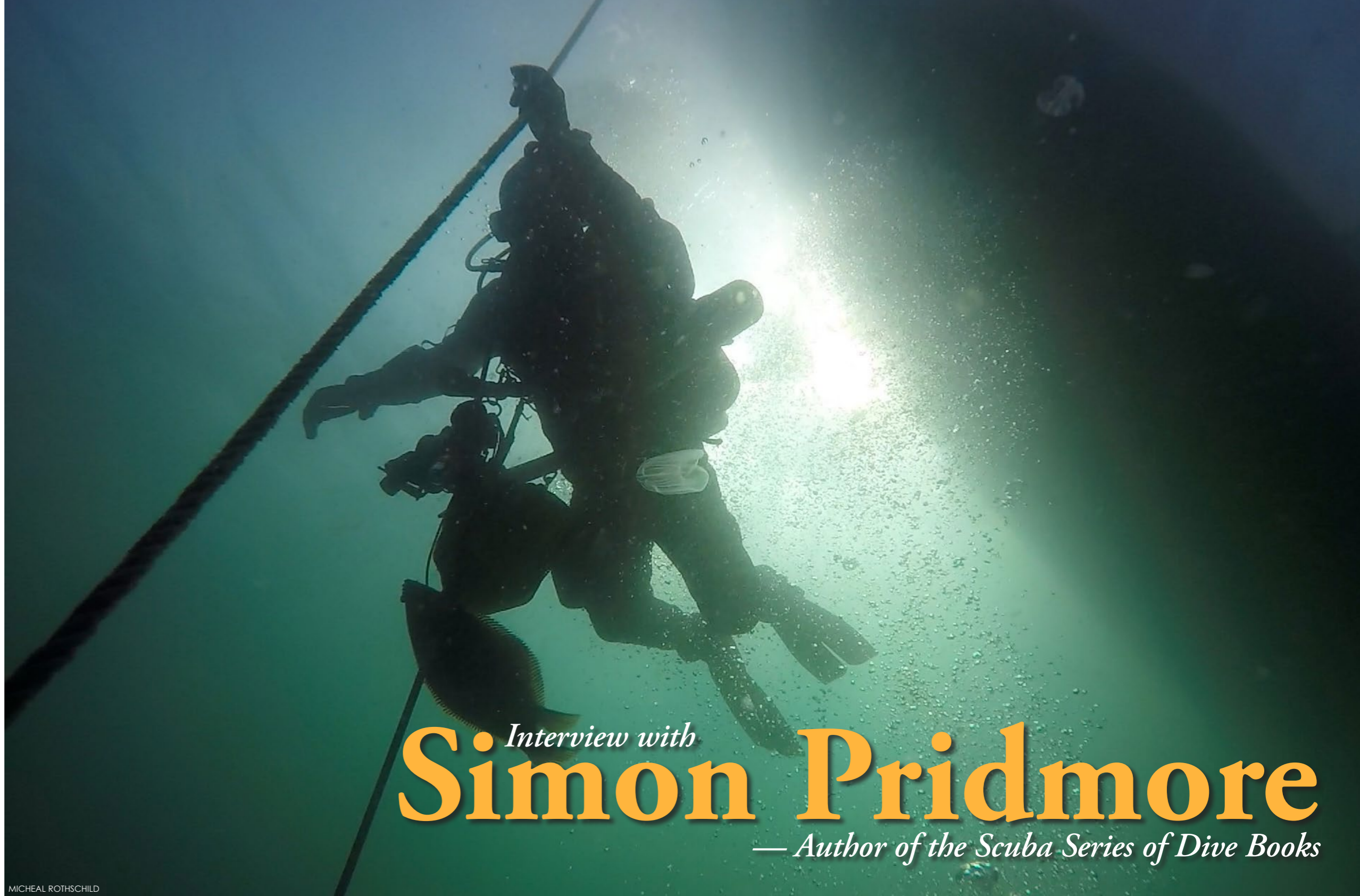
Interview edited by Catherine GS Lim
Photos courtesy of Simon Pridmore,
Scott Bennett, Michael Rothschild and
Theresa Teo

— In this series of intriguing interviews,
DecoStop Q&A seeks to learn more
about the people making waves in
the dive world.

In this edition, we meet dive
professional, technical diving
expert, accomplished writer and
X-Ray Mag columnist Simon
Pridmore, to find out his motiva-
tions for writing his Scuba series
of dive books, and how his
books are different from other
dive books on the market.



Author and columnist Simon Pridmore with
our associate editor Catherine GS Lim



Interview with **Simon Pridmore** — Author of the Scuba Series of Dive Books

MICHAEL ROTHSCHILD

How did your Scuba series of books come about?

In the late 1990s, I was generating lots of articles for dive magazines and Action Asia editor Robert Houston asked me if I could collate the articles into a book, which he would then

publish. We were going to call it "Safe Diving." For a variety of reasons, this never happened, but those chats with Robert were certainly what put the idea into my head. It would be a long time until I actually got around to it though.

A lot of people write articles. Why did Robert think yours could be turned into a book?

He said he particularly liked two things about them. First, they were not trying to sell anything or promote the methods of any particular training

agency. And second, they bypassed the traditional training "pyramid" that divers have to climb in order to obtain more advanced knowledge. Instead, my articles were deliberately revealing all the tips, tricks, science and concepts that researchers, technicians, dive professionals and techni-





SCOTT BENNETT

cal divers know, making the knowledge available to everyone, no matter which certification card they held.

What made you take this approach?

During the time, I was running my dive centre in Guam. I noticed that many of the people who came to dive with us, even those who were quite experienced, always tended to make the same mistakes and lacked key skills or information that would make them better divers. It was obvious that training courses were failing in some way and that the problem was systemic. So, I thought I would try and fix that by putting the knowledge out there in what I hoped would be a readable, entertaining and accessible form.

What was wrong with existing dive training manuals?

I identified three issues. First: they were only designed to instruct and were not much fun to read. So, divers tended just to skim through them and not retain very much.

Second: as course schedules became shorter, instructors had less time for teaching, so they focused on water work and topics that featured in quizzes and exams, hoping that divers would read their manuals to learn everything else. And that was not happening.

Third: the training pyramid is highly effective from a marketing and business point of view,

but it only turns out fully skilled and informed divers if they reach the top and not many do. Most just complete lower-level courses and may not even be aware that further knowledge, which would help them become more competent, even exists. They believe they already know all they need to know. Dubbing new-ish divers as “advanced” and “master” does not help.

Were you not worried that, by giving people the knowledge they needed without them having to take a training course, you might be taking business away from instructors and dive businesses?

I thought long and hard about this. In the end, I decided this would not be the case. After all, nothing in a book can match the benefits of working with a dive instructor in the water, learning to apply knowledge practically and being assessed and guided on skills improvement individually. I hoped that, on the contrary, by revealing what there is to learn by doing further diver training—that

is, that it is not all just a cash-collecting, card-issuing exercise—I might actually drive business to dive centres and instructors instead.

Do you think that has happened?

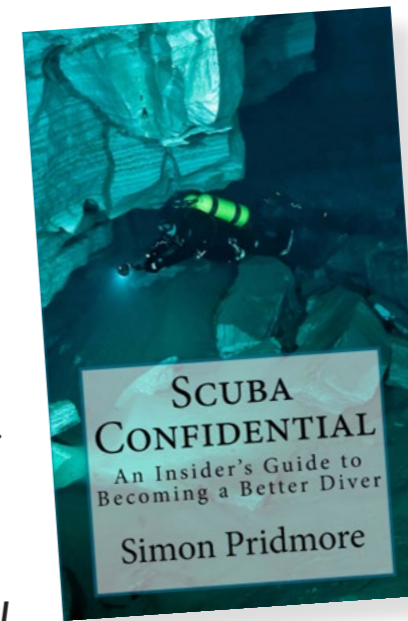
I do. Judging from numerous reviews over the years, saying things along the lines of “...having read Simon Pridmore’s book, I have decided to take up XYZ diver training...”,



it seems the books have had a positive effect in that respect. Something I am very happy about. Win-win all round!

This explains the motivation behind *Scuba Confidential* and *Scuba Exceptional*. What about *Scuba Fundamental* and *Scuba Professional*? You must have had other things in mind when you wrote those.

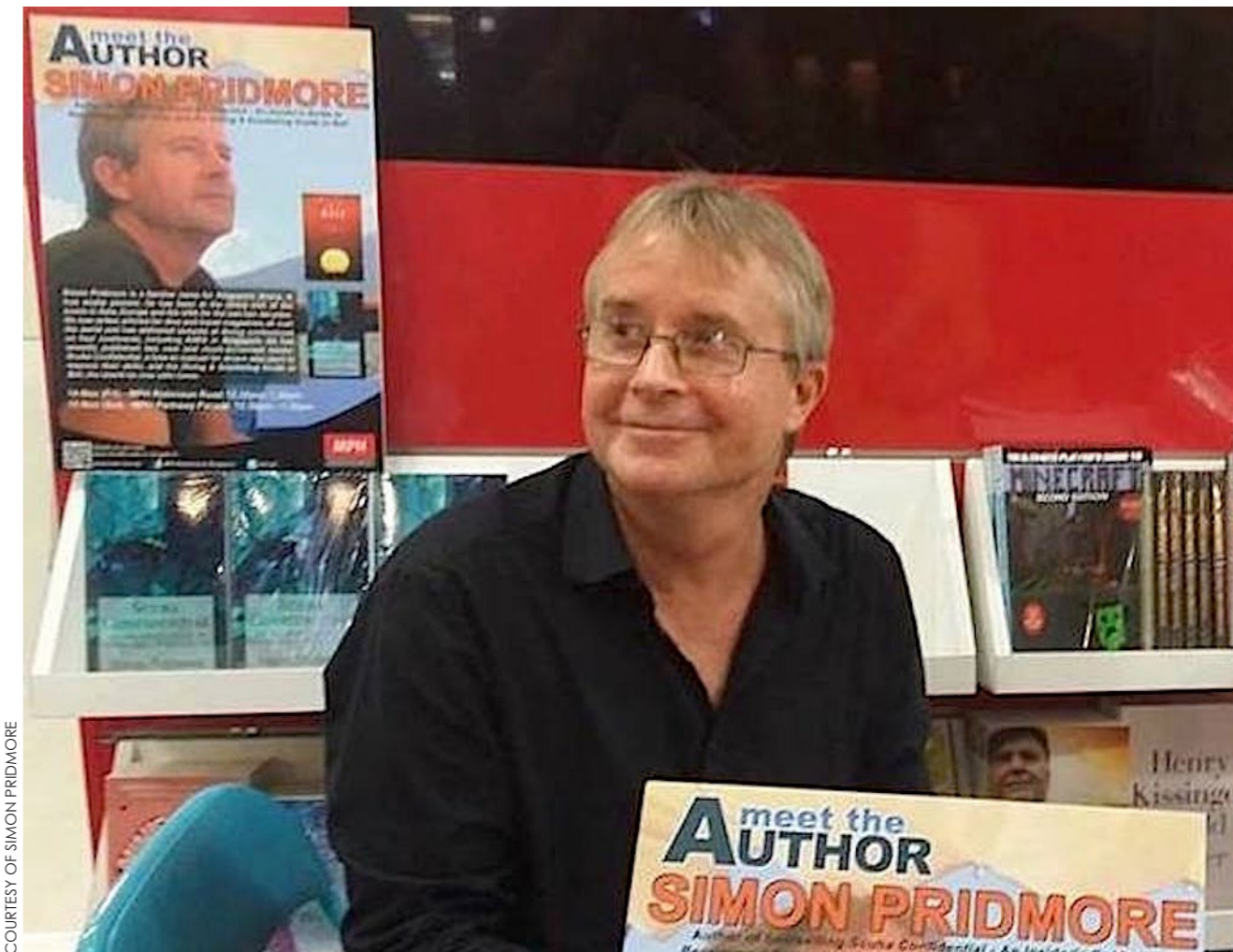
I did. Diver dropout has always been a huge problem for our sport. Many



Simon Pridmore

people take a try-dive experience or even complete a full beginner’s course, yet never dive again. You meet so many people who, when they hear you are a diver, say something like, “Oh yes, I tried that once. It was not for me.”

Of course, scuba diving is not for everybody but the statistics for the number of people who do a try-dive—a diving experience—and then go on to get their beginner’s certification are terrible. It is far fewer than one in ten and closer to one in a hundred. There are similar horrific statistics worldwide for the number of people who take a first dive course and



COURTESY OF SIMON PRIDMORE

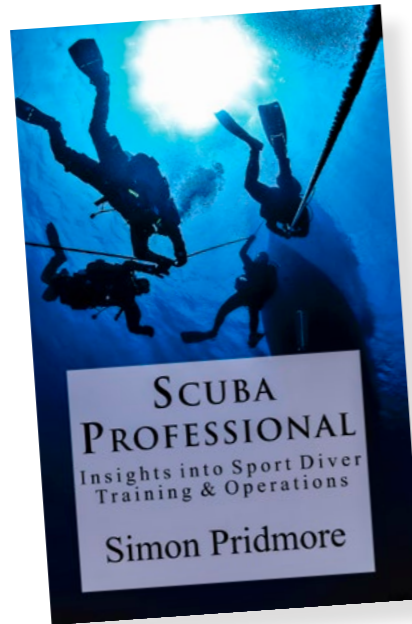
Author Simon Pridmore at a book signing of his books



never do a second. Which, as you need a second certification to be taken on dives deeper than 18 metres, suggests that, in fact, these people are never diving again.

Why do you think that is?

The problem is that people wanting to learn to dive usually have no idea what they are getting into. There is a communication disconnect between



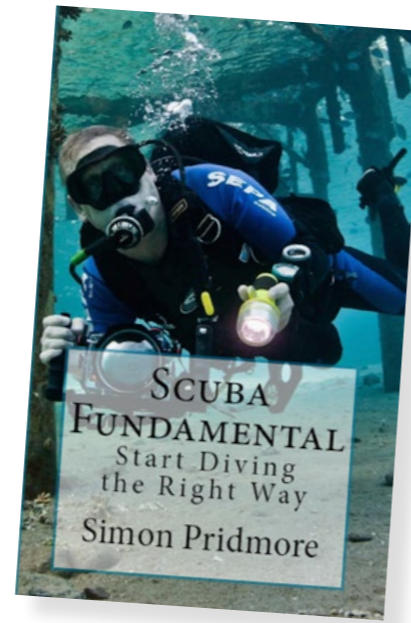
the diving world and the non-diving world.

A great example is the question: "Do you need to be able to swim before you take a scuba diving course?"

A non-diver will probably reply: "I do not know but it does not matter. If I need to

be able to swim, I am sure my dive instructor will teach me."

The dive shop sales staff will prob-



ably fudge it: "It is not a big deal. If you can make it up and down the pool a couple of times, that will be fine."

The instructor will say: "This person cannot swim properly. I have hardly got enough time to teach them to dive, let alone teach them to swim too. Anyway, I do not have swimming instructor qualifications."

And the dive centre owner will say: "They have paid their money and they expect to pass the course. Make it happen."

Of course, any experienced diver will shout: "Of course, you need to be able to swim! Comfort in the water is crucial. If you cannot swim well, you will never make it as a diver."

So, that is why you wrote *Scuba Fundamental*?

Yes, as far as I could tell, nobody had ever written a scuba diving book for non-divers. My idea was to arm them with all the information they need in advance, long before they even walked into the dive centre. They would be able to read about what to expect from the course and the sport, and judge if it was something they were capable of and wanted to do. They would know how to prepare, what equipment to buy, what to look for in an instructor and so on. *Scuba Fundamental* does not teach you how to dive, but, if you read it, follow the advice and then take a course,

NEW 4 in 1!

Simon Pridmore has released a new single-volume e-book, bringing together four books in his bestselling *Scuba* series:

- *Scuba Fundamental – Start Diving the Right Way*
- *Scuba Confidential – An Insider's Guide to Becoming a Better Diver*
- *Scuba Exceptional – Become the Best Diver You Can Be, and*
- *Scuba Professional – Insights into Sport Diver Training & Operations*

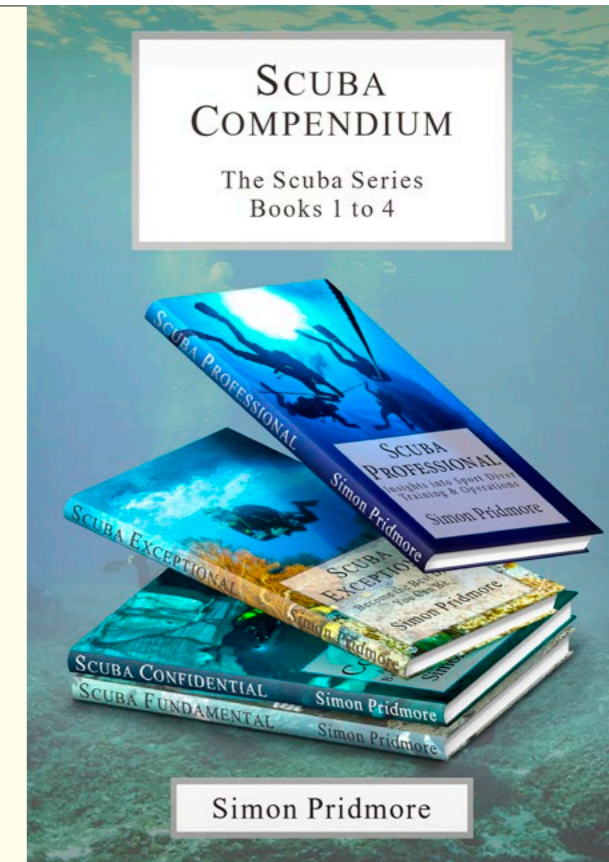
As Simon puts it, this is "a remastering and repackaging of the original albums rather than a greatest hits." Nothing is missing. *Scuba Compendium* gives e-book readers the advantage of being able to access all the knowledge contained in the four books in one place, making this a unique and easily searchable work of reference for divers at every level.

Simon has always promoted the idea of safer diving through the acquisition of knowledge, which is why he has chosen to release this highly accessible version. If you have read his work before, you will know that he provides divers with extremely useful advice and information, much

you are far more likely to become a long-term diver and not just have spent your money for nothing.

And I suppose you wrote *Scuba Professional* for a similar purpose?

Yes, exactly! Instructor dropout is a major issue too. Too many divers spend thousands of dollars on training to become a scuba instructor. They pass the exam and get their card, but never renew their certification after it expires at the end of their first year.

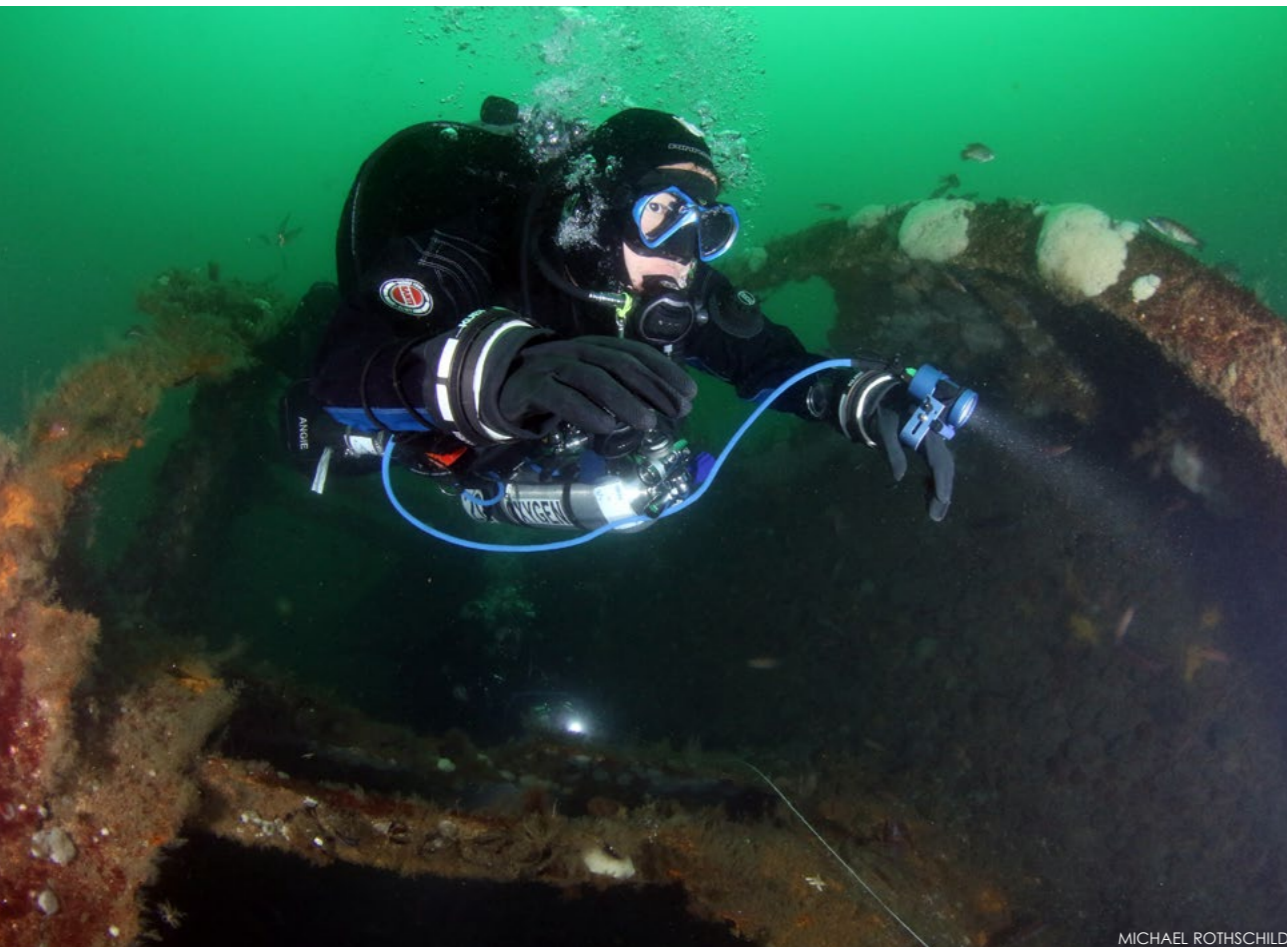


of it unavailable elsewhere; his points often illustrated by real-life experiences and cautionary tales. He examines familiar issues from new angles, looks at the wider picture and borrows techniques and procedures from other areas of human activity.

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simonpridmore.com

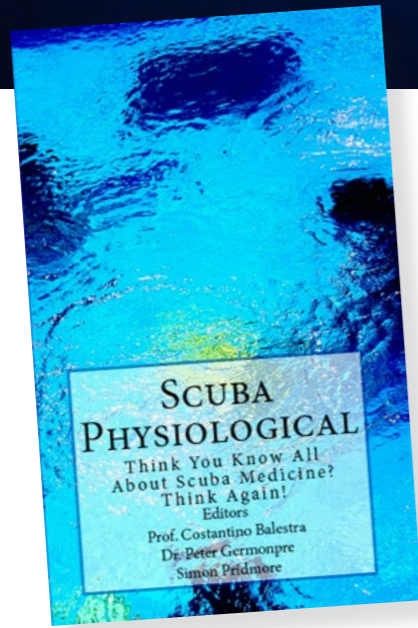
What a waste of time and effort! Again, as I see it, the problem is poor communication. Even as a diver, how could you ever know if you would be suited to teaching scuba or what it is actually like to work in diving. It looks like it is so easy, just hanging out, laughing and joking, taking people diving and giving them a good time. But, of course, it is our job to make it look like that. The customers just see the duck above the water drifting serenely along. They do not see all the paddling that is going on below.



MICHAEL ROTHSCHILD



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So, in *Scuba Professional*, I try to fix this problem and make potential instructors aware of things like: the qualities and mind-set you need, what an instructor course really teaches you, the challenges you will encounter and how to turn a job opportunity into a long successful career. In this last respect, of course, *Scuba Professional* is also designed to be a useful tool for

existing guides, instructors and dive shop owners.

Scuba Physiological is a different type of book altogether, is it not?

It is. A friend who designs decompression tables told me about a book he had contributed to called *The Science of Diving*. He said it had not sold very well and sent me a copy. I saw immediately why it had not been successful. It had been written by scientists for scientists and was

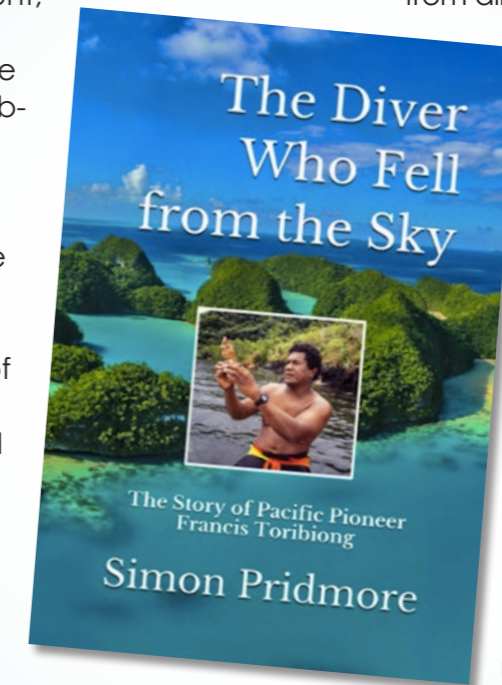
very hard to read. But it had some incredible information on decompression, narcosis and what happens to our bodies when we dive, much of which I had never seen before. So, I asked the editors if I could try and rewrite it for a less expert readership. They agreed and *Scuba Physiological* is the result.

So, in a nutshell, that is what the Scuba series is all about—making the knowledge accessible to everyone. What's next?

I am now working on *Technically Speaking*, which will include all the

A Pioneer Story by 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.



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 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 the first Palauan ever to seek and seize the international narrative. No Palauan, in any context or field, had 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**

talks I have delivered at technical diving shows over the years, as well as take a detailed look at where technical diving came from and how it developed. It is an interesting exercise—looking back at an important part of my life and considering it from an historical perspective. I am not that old, how can it be history already? ■

Simon Pridmore is the author of the international bestsellers *Scuba Fundamental: Start Diving the Right Way*, *Scuba Confidential: An Insider's Guide to Becoming a Better Diver*, *Scuba Exceptional: Become the Best Diver You Can Be*, and *Scuba*

Professional: Insights into Sport Diver Training & Operations, which are now available in a compendium. He is also the co-author of the *Diving & Snorkeling Guide to Bali* and the *Diving & Snorkeling Guide to Raja Ampat & Northeast Indonesia*. His recent published books include *The Diver Who Fell From The Sky*, *Dive into Taiwan*, *Scuba Physiological: Think You Know All About Scuba Medicine? Think Again!* and the *Dining with Divers* series of cookbooks. For more information, please see his website at: **SimonPridmore.com**.