

Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Beach Club in Oman in the 1980s (right); Map of Oman (below)

*Learning to Dive*

# Back in the Day

Text and photos courtesy of Simon Pridmore

**Scuba training has come a long way since its early days. Simon Pridmore takes an entertaining look back at what was required of students just a few decades ago.**

A friend of mine recently sent me a copy of the diving logbook he used when he did his first diver training with what was then the Malayan Sub Aqua Club. As my friend guessed, this is the same logbook I was given when I signed up for my first dive course.

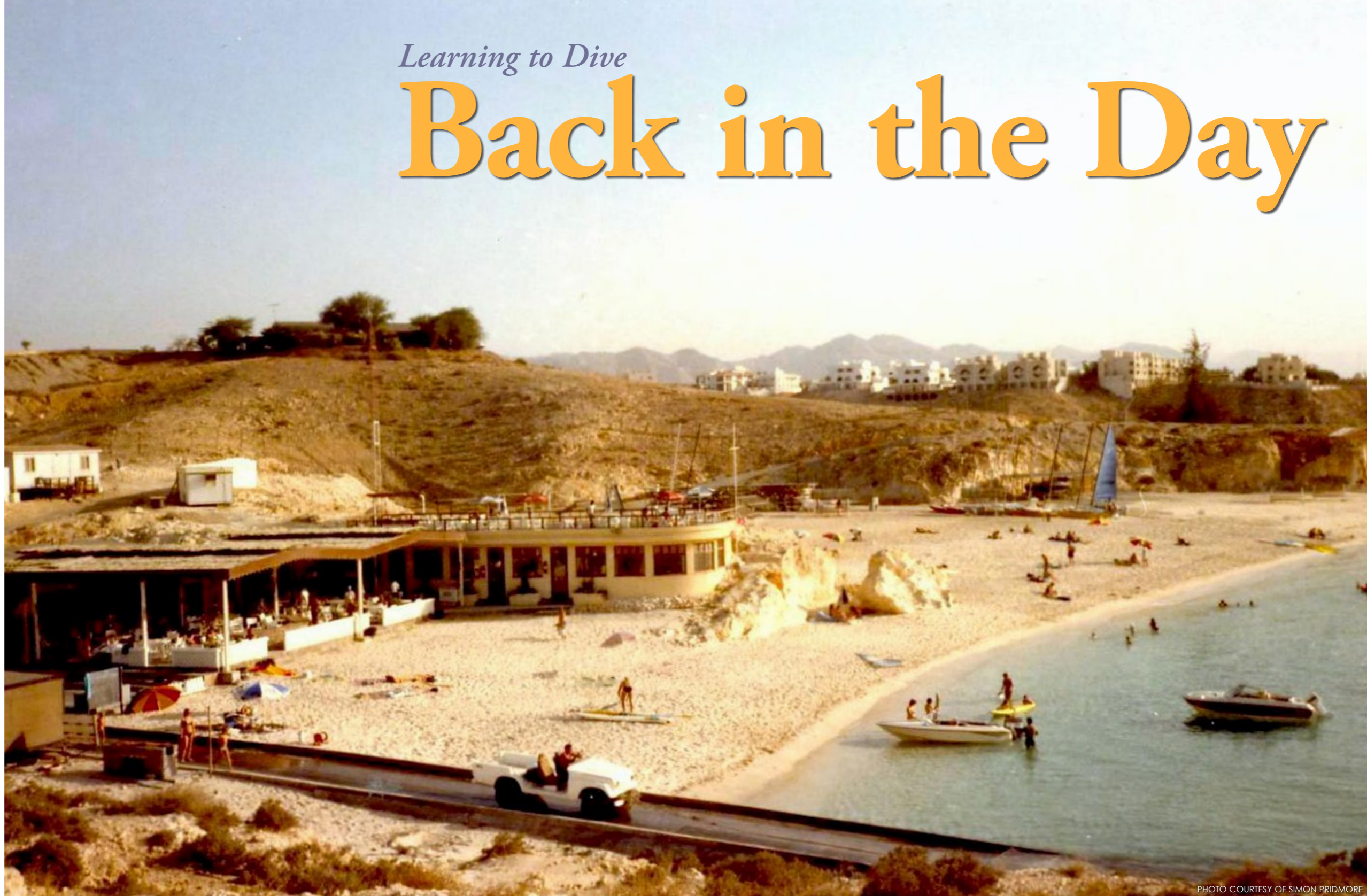
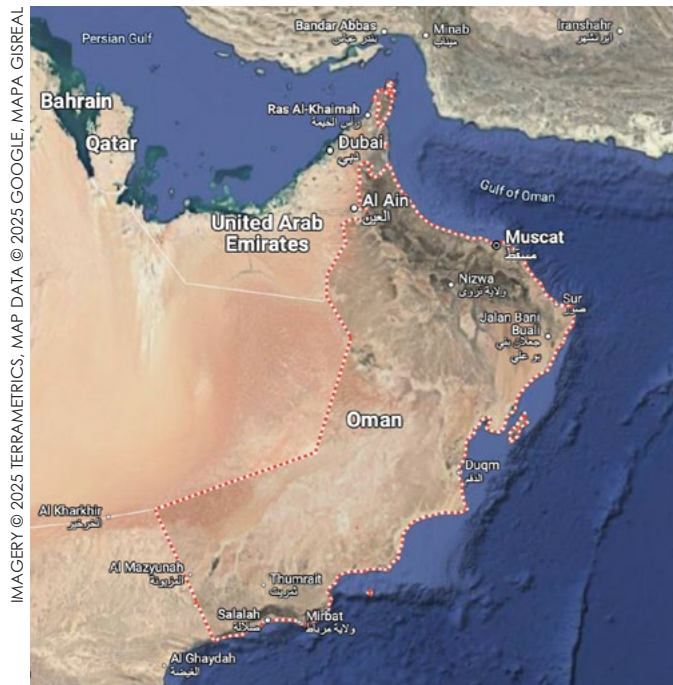


PHOTO COURTESY OF SIMON PRIDMORE



My original logbook is long gone, and seeing this brought back a flood of long-lost memories. I thought you might be entertained by a quick run-down of what we had to go through and the skills we needed to master to become sport divers in those days.

Let's first turn back the clock to 1981...

I learned to dive in the Sultanate of Oman, where I was living on an air-base west of Muscat and working as a teacher for the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF). A few days a week (it was a tough job), my colleagues and

I would go to the SAF beach club (pictured above), where I would go swimming or windsurfing. It was way too hot to lie on the beach.

Now and again, I would watch the scuba divers tow their boat down the ramp (which you can see at the bottom of the picture) and head out for

a dive. They always came back looking very happy, and I thought: "I'd like to try that." So, I applied for the next course.

### Swim test

On day one, at the base swimming pool, to prove that we were comfort-



PHOTO COURTESY OF SIMON PRIDMORE

Snorkel briefing with student and instructor

able in the water, we were asked to do a swim test, which involved carrying out these drills in quick succession:

1. Swim 200m (yards) using any stroke (except backstroke) without stopping.
2. Swim 100m backstroke without stopping.
3. Swim 50m wearing a weight belt with 5kg of weight.
4. Float on your back for 5 minutes.
5. Tread water with your hands above

your head for 1 minute.

6. Recover six items from the bottom of the deep end of the pool (one object per dive).

### Snorkel training

Having passed this, at our next pool meeting a few days later, we moved on to learn how to use what was referred to as "basic equipment", which meant mask, fins and snorkel. We practised snorkelling in the pool for a week or two under the supervi-

sion of our instructor, and then, once they considered that we were ready, we had to perform the following "primary tests" all together in one session under the watchful eye of a club examiner.

1. Throw the mask, fins and snorkel into the deep end, then dive for each item in turn and put it on at the surface.
2. Fin for 200m, duck diving to the bottom every 25m.

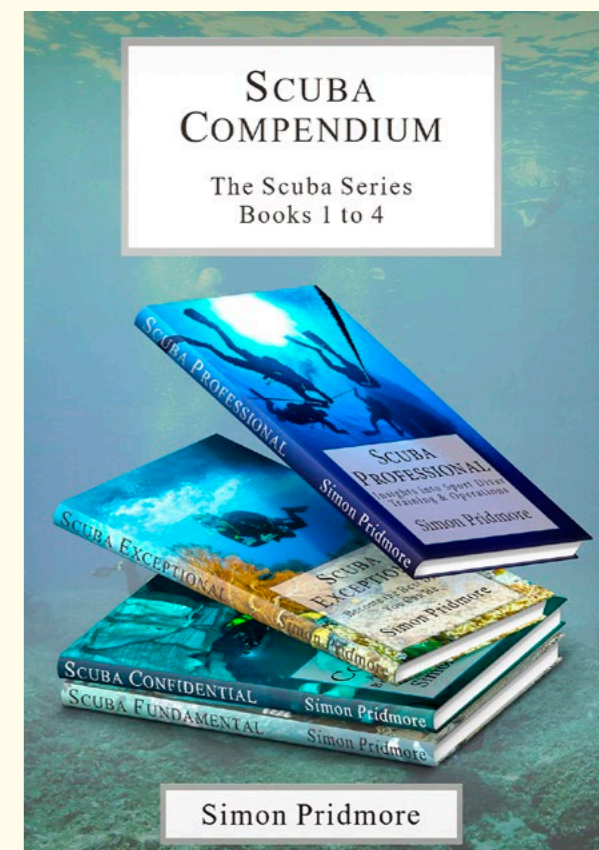
## NEW 4 in 1!

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



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.

E-book File Size: 5298 KB  
Published by Sandsmedia  
Sold by: **Amazon, Kobo, Tolino** & others  
ASIN: B09DBGHJSC

[simonpridmore.com](http://simonpridmore.com)

3. Tow another person for 50m while delivering emergency breaths, then land the body and continue rescue breathing.
4. Do three forward rolls and three backward rolls in the water (taking a breath between rolls)
5. Fin for 15m underwater.
6. Hold our breath for 30 seconds underwater.
7. Fin for 50m wearing a weight belt with 5kg of weight.
8. Release the weight belt in the

- deep end of the pool and remove the mask.
9. Fin for 50m, face submerged, using the snorkel but no mask.
10. Then replace the mask, surface dive, recover and refit the weight belt and give an OK signal.
11. Finally, fin for a further 50m, wearing the 5kg weight belt.

### Open-water tests and lectures

On successful completion of these tests, we had to attend at least three

club dive trips as snorkellers, during which we performed an open-water test consisting of a 500m snorkel swim, a surface dive to a depth of 7m, then rescue a fellow snorkeller in difficulty and tow them for 50m to shore on the surface.

We also attended several lectures, which covered sinuses, circulation and respiration, hypox-

ia, anoxia and drowning, rescue and resuscitation, signals and surfacing, exhaustion, exposure, diving suits, protective clothing and ancillary equipment.

After all that, we were accorded the rating of snorkel diver and, with the approval of the club diving officer, we could now “progress to pool aqualung training”. At

this point in our scuba diving course, we had not yet even touched a scuba cylinder.

### Pool aqualung training

Our initial training with scuba equipment consisted of acquiring several skills, which we had to learn to perform well because, at the end of the course, there would be a series

Rescue tow drill (right); Training in the pool (below)



PHOTO COURTESY OF SIMON PRIDMORE



PHOTO COURTESY OF SIMON PRIDMORE

of practical tests to pass. These were taken all together in one session, as follows.

1. Fit harness and regulator to a cylinder. Test and adjust as necessary.
2. Sink all the equipment into the deep end of the pool. Dive down and put the equipment on.
3. Remove the mouthpiece underwater. Replace it and clear it. Do this three times.
4. Remove the mask underwater, replace it and clear it, again three times.
5. Do three forward and three backward rolls underwater.
6. Demonstrate buoyancy control by adjusting your level by the depth of your respiration only. Breathe out hard and lie on the bottom

of the pool. Then, lift yourself off the bottom by controlling your inspiration.

7. Fin 100m on the surface as follows:
  - a) 50m alternating between snorkel and regulator.
  - b) 50m on your back, wearing the aqualung but using neither snorkel nor regulator.
8. From the deep end of the training pool, surface, remove the regulator, put your snorkel in and give the OK signal. Repeat twice more.
9. Share aqualung at depth with a companion at a depth of 3m or less. Establish buddy breathing, then fin for 25m providing air and 25m receiving air. (These were in the days before octopuses

when a diver only had a single second stage.)

10. Fin 50m underwater in a blacked-out mask, either guided by a companion or following a rope.
11. Fin 50m at speed while submerged, ending up in the deep end to find a companion diver simulating insensibility. Release both weight belts, bring the body to the surface and tow it for 25m, incorporating rescue breathing.
12. Remove both sets of equipment in the water, land the body and continue rescue breathing.

Having demonstrated mastery of these exercises, we could then progress (at last) to open water aqualung training.





PHOTO COURTESY OF SIMON PRIDMORE

Pool session with scuba (above); Open-water boat dive with scuba (right)

## Open-water aqualung training

Once we eventually made it to the ocean, we then had to log ten qualifying dives in at least five different places and on five different dates. These dives had to include five of the eight qualifying conditions or environments, as follows:

- a) A shore dive along a shelving bottom.
- b) A dive from a boat.
- c) A dive in freshwater.
- d) A dive in moving water (1 knot minimum).
- e) A dive in seawater.
- f) A low-visibility dive (less than 2m).
- g) A dive to 25m.
- h) A dive on a reef or coral outcrop.

During these dives, we had to show that we could perform the skills we had practised in the pool and repeat them over and over again until the instructor was satisfied with our competence.

Finally, after doing all this, plus attending lectures on physics, burst lung, emergency ascent, air cylinders and endurance, underwater navigation, decompression sickness, nitrogen narcosis, carbon monoxide poisoning, oxygen poisoning, deep diving and other topics, and getting 100% in a final 50-question written exam, three months after we first jumped into the pool for our swim test, it was announced that we were now third-class divers.

Third class! What an accomplishment. Now, we could go and have some fun at last! ■

*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, now available as a compendium. He is also co-author of the Diving & Snorkeling Guide to Bali and the Diving & Snorkeling Guide to Raja Ampat & Northeast Indonesia. His latest 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. Visit: [SimonPridmore.com](http://SimonPridmore.com).*

C. F. HOWLETT / CREATIVE LINUX / FLICKR / CC BY-SA 2.0

## A New Dive Book from Simon Pridmore

"Simon Pridmore's new book, 'Technically Speaking' is an outstanding tour de force from one of modern diving's most accomplished practitioners and best-selling authors."

— David Strike, Oztek & Tekdive Convenor

"Simon has completed a complex task with consummate skill and has accurately unravelled the when's, the who's and some of the why's, much of which would have been unjustifiably lost in the mists of time if not for this work."

— Kevin Gurr, Technical Diving Inventor & Innovator

"It will take some doing to better this account of tech's first steps... as no matter how much you know or think you know; you will still find many obscure historical gems..."

— Kevin Denlay, Early Adopter & Wreck Finder

Technically Speaking is the latest book from best-selling Scuba series author Simon Pridmore. It is a selection of themed talks telling the early history of technical diving—where it came from, how it developed, how it expanded across

the world, who the important movers were and how, in the decade from 1989 to 1999, the efforts of a few determined people changed scuba diving forever.

These ten years saw the greatest shake-up the sport has ever seen but technical diving's road to universal acceptance was anything but smooth, many obstacles had to be overcome and there were times when even viewed in retrospect, it seemed that its advocates might fail in their mission. Ultimately, success came down to perseverance, people power, good timing and more than a little luck.



Available in hardback, paperback and ebook at [Amazon Worldwide](http://AmazonWorldwide), [Apple](http://Apple), [Kobo](http://Kobo), and [Tolino](http://Tolino). See [SimonPridmore.com](http://SimonPridmore.com)

