

# Vagaries of a prospecting life

Miner and entrepreneur Jim Richards has had some notable escapades, writes **William Yeoman**

**Y**ou could say Perth mining executive Jim Richards has done it all. He's dived for diamonds in the piranha-infested rivers of South America. He's discovered a fabulously rich goldmine in the Australian outback. He was caught up in the world's biggest mining scam in Indonesia. He even started a gold rush in the war-torn jungles of Laos.

"To take on that level of risk that I did requires some considered preparation," he laughs. "I would recommend three years in the army as a good start. However, gold prospecting here in Australia is quite accessible and for the tenacious can lead to some serious money."

When Richards left the

British army to join a modern-day gold rush in the early 1990s, he had no language skills, no money and no idea.

Richards has prospected and mined in some of the maddest, most dangerous places on earth, where isolation, disease and violent criminals come with the territory. He has founded a string of successful mining businesses.

"How you react to chance, luck and random events is a defining factor in successful prospecting," he says.

"So it was with me, by chance, when I was 17 I got a job working as a tour guide at an old Roman goldmine in Wales: the fascinating geology and history of the place gave me gold fever and I have had it

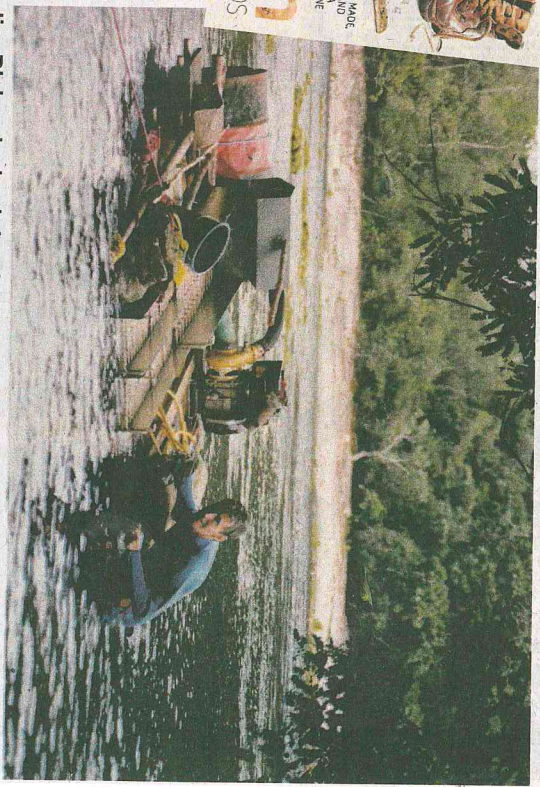
ever since."

Ever since 1992, when Richards was prospecting in Guyana, he wanted to write a memoir: "I felt the experiences from that special place would make a wonderful story. However, a good memoir requires some perspective and it was not until 2009 that I seriously started writing *Gold Rush*."

A keen interest in history also helped. "I have had a lifelong interest in historic gold rushes and they provide constant surprises," he says. "For instance, going for a walk through the graveyard in Coolgardie, which was full of the graves of young men who had died in the massive typhoid epidemic of 1895, was a sobering revelation."

He says gold rushes have had a profound effect on Australian history "right from social developments driven by events such as the Eureka Stockade to the mass migrations as a result of economic changes".

Richards' time as a member of the British Parachute Regiment helped prepare him for the challenges of being a



Jim Richards dredging in Guyana.

prospector. "It gave me the self-confidence I needed to embark upon quite a daunting challenge," he says.

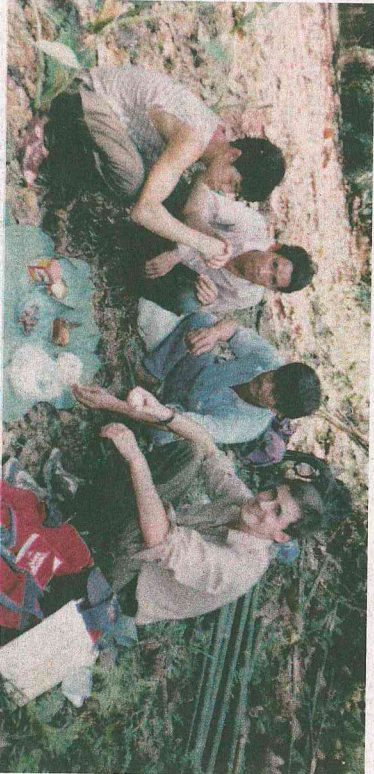
"But from the military I also gained a skill set which included dealing with people, keeping my nerve in tough situations and reasonable judgment.

"Six months with the Provisional IRA trying to kill us in Northern Ireland was also quite helpful."

According to Richards the environment, in the form of illnesses and accidents, was the biggest risk "but it was the occasional nightmare group of criminals I came across that could have been fatal". As for the continued

sustainability of mining in general, Richards is optimistic. "The world has never run out of any minerals," he says. "Economists predict we shall, yet geologists keep proving them wrong. Mining is about doing things the right way or the wrong way. I believe in doing mining the right way. "In resources, one man's plunder is another man's laptop. The people who use the stuff are also culpable as to how it is extracted. My book goes some way to addressing these moral dilemmas."

**Gold Rush** is published by Fremantle Press (\$33).



Richards lunching in Laos.