

there for 13 years before taking my current job at the Sanctuary.”

**CD: “What do you expect to be doing professionally in five or ten years?”**

WD: “I suppose I’ll still be managing the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. But I never figured I’d get here.”



*Arthur Dahl is director of the Coral Reef Unit of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The Coral Reef Unit was established in December 2000 to lead international efforts for coral reef protection. An expert on reef ecology, Dahl earned his Ph.D. from UCSB in 1969.*

**Coastal Discovery: “When were you at UCSB?”**

Arthur Dahl: “I participated in a UCSB program for high school juniors back in 1959. Later, in 1964, I became one of the very early graduate students in the new marine laboratory.”

**CD: “What did you study as a graduate student?”**

AD: “I studied the developmental systems of a marine alga, how the plant’s form develops, and the interaction between the cellular control systems and the environment. Essentially, it was the relationship between the ecology, developmental systems, and form of the plant.”

**CD: “Did you have a vision back then that you’d be doing what you do today?”**

AD: “Ecology was my major interest, and my long-term aim was to become an environmental advisor to governments, even though at that time that career didn’t exist. I really wanted to work with developing countries and help them with their problems.”

**CD: “How did your career progress after graduate school?”**

AD: “I caught the first wave of the environmental movement because the Santa Barbara oil spill of 1969 came in over my research material, so we were all out doing pollution studies. Then I accepted a postdoctoral position at the Smithsonian Institution, where I went into coral reef ecology as my specialty. My first work as a postdoc involved setting up ecological surveys to observe long-term changes in reefs. After my postdoc, I became curator of algae at the Museum



Lifeguard tower at Campus Point



Dennis Divins



Dr. Jim Kennett, fourth director of MSI



Bill Wheeler instructing students at touch tanks



Dr. Mike Neushul

of Natural History. I was there a total of five years before sailing off to establish a South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, where I was the ecological advisor to 22 countries.”

**CD: “What kind of work did that involve?”**

AD: “Initially I went around to all the countries and talked with ministers and heads of departments to define what the environmental problems were and how could they respond to them. The area I was responsible for covered everything from Pitcairn Island to the Northern Mariana Islands. I ended up doing everything from primary school curricula to drafting legislation to doing scientific surveys. Now the program has a staff of 60 that works on everything from climate change to biodiversity management, legislation, and pollution control.”

**CD: “What opportunities did you pursue next?”**

AD: “I spent six years freelancing as a consultant on environmental issues for governments, the UN, the IUCN, UNEP, and other organizations. Then in 1989 UNEP offered me the job as deputy director of the Regional Seas Programme. At that time, there were 12 Regional Seas Programmes involving some 140 countries. It was the same kind of thing I’d done for the South Pacific, but for each of the major seas of the world where governments needed to cooperate on common management of shared resources. After the Rio Declaration of 1992, for which I helped draft the action plan for governments, UNEP reassigned me to become coordinator of the UN System-wide Earthwatch. So I’d gone from specializing in one row of cells in an alga on the Santa Barbara coast to being responsible for monitoring of the global environment.”

**CD: “Did you find it useful to have studied the algae?”**

AD: “Very much so. The foundation that I had in ecology and biology at UCSB gave me the understanding of systems and how they function, which then could be generalized to these larger scales of operation and organization. UCSB gave me very broad training in biological sciences. I think that breadth has been extremely important for the kind of work that I do. The whole approach of UCSB to training in the marine sciences is a very valuable one.”

**CD: “How did you move into your current position?”**

AD: “There’s been a lot of concern since the last big El Niño event that coral reefs are declining extremely quickly. The UNEP executive director decided last November to create a Coral Reef Unit to launch a major international program of action to reverse the trend of decline. I was a coral reef specialist within the organization, and he appointed me as director of the new unit.”

**CD: “What kind of activities do you anticipate?”**

AD: “We’re building a partnership of all the key international orga-



Lagoon peninsula circa 1975



Floyd DeWitt



Dr. Henry Offen, second director of MSI

## Special Edition: Education

nizations concerned with coral reefs. We see coral reefs as being the canaries in the coal mines of marine ecosystems. We'll be using certain well-managed reefs as training centers, bringing people from other areas to show them how they can manage their reefs effectively. We're trying to put coral reef management on a more sustainable basis internationally."

