

## CGS Members and Friends

With sadness we convey the passing of John Dunham.



CGS member and retired petroleum exploration geologist John B. Dunham passed away on Sunday, May 4th 2025 in Ventura, California.

John started his career as a carbonate research geologist at the Unocal Research Center in Brea, CA, in 1978, shortly after receiving his PhD from the University of California, Riverside. Work ranged from mapping and measuring outcrop sections to describing cores from exploration wells and writing reports; in areas from Devonian reefs of Canada to the Permian of West Texas, and the Miocene Monterey Formation of California. During his tenure at the Research Center, John met and later married his wife Michelle, who also worked in the geological group at the Research Center.

John was best known locally for his contributions studying the Monterey Formation. Working with the Unocal exploration team, he analyzed the Monterey outcrops along the coastline from the Santa Barbara area to the Mussel Rock area in the Santa Maria basin. His 1987 field guide, written with Gregg Blake, was a concise, practical description of Monterey outcrops on Vandenberg Air Force Base, and still provides a valuable reference today. He also became one of the experts in understanding the effect of the silica phase changes on potential Monterey reservoir sections. His research was instrumental in Unocal's successful bid for the primary tract of what became the offshore Point Pedernales Field. John was most proud of convincing management of the lease's potential and of outbidding some major oil companies, such as Exxon and Chevron, to become the field operator.

In 1988, John made the transition from research geologist to exploration geologist. He was instrumental in applying his knowledge of Monterey reservoirs to potential biogenic targets in the Mid-Cretaceous La Luna Formation of Venezuela and the La Luna equivalent, Naparima Hills Formation in Trinidad. Based on John's work, Unocal lease blocks in offshore Trinidad, and drilling three wildcat exploration wells looking for fractured biogenic reservoirs in the Naparima Hills section. The wells all found oil, but unfortunately, the fractures were filled with silica cement.

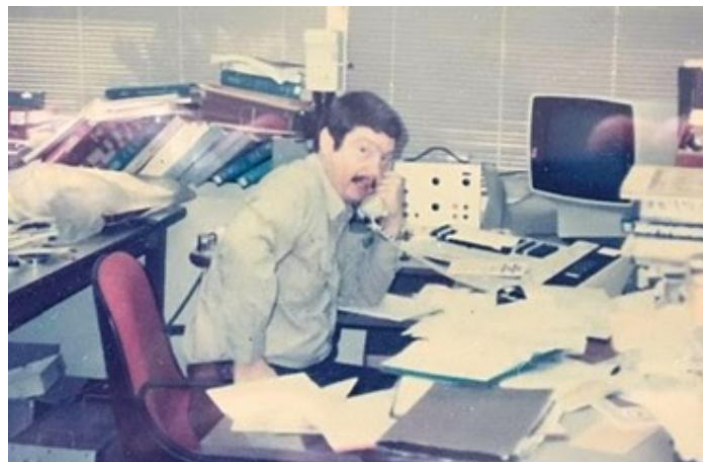
John later joined the Worldwide Exploration group, eventually transferring to Unocal Indonesia on the Island of Borneo in 1997. He was on the exploration team looking at Unocal's frontier acreage in the Kutei basin and stayed there until the Chevron merger. Because of his vast experience, John was well-versed in all the critical aspects of exploration and adept at evaluating drilling risks in "wildcat" exploration environments. John worked on a team that drilled over 20 wells in deep water and made significant oil and gas discoveries.

After he retired from Chevron in 2006, John consulted for several independent companies in Indonesia, including Niko, Hess, and APEC, working on potential exploration plays in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. In 2013 he finally retired, and he and Michelle moved to Ventura, CA. Even in "retirement," John remained active, attending and presenting talks at local and international societies, including most recently at the GSA meeting this past fall in Anaheim. John continued publishing a few papers, including in the 2018 SEPM Special Publication 109, Characterization and Modeling of Carbonate Reservoirs. John was a California Licensed Professional Geologist and a member of the Coast Geological Society where he frequently attended meetings.

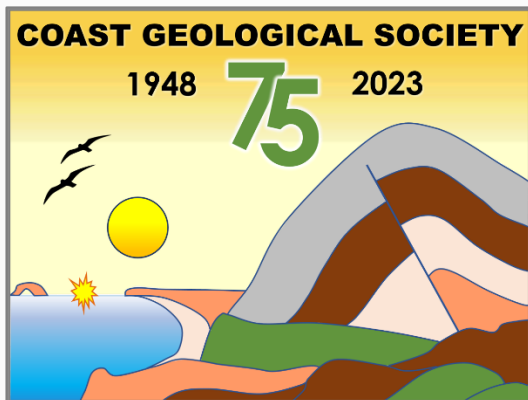
In March 2019, John presented *Lessons in Project Management from the deep water of Indonesia and from the Gulf of Mexico* to CGS. His talk related his experience with deep-water, high-pressure wildcat wells to finding from British Petroleum's Macondo-1 well in the Gulf of Mexico where the Transocean Deepwater Horizon rig exploded in April 2010 when oil and gas at pressures of over 11,000 psi blew out from the well.

John also enjoyed a good vintage wine and would visit areas such as Napa Valley and Paso Robles with friends in search of the next "discovery." Retirement also afforded John time to refine his golf game, and he played regularly with friends for many years.

John will truly be missed for his gentlemanly demeanor and insightful wit. A few years ago, John and his wife Michelle endowed a fund for field studies with the Geology Department at UC Riverside in honor of his thesis advisor. In lieu of flowers or gifts, contributions in John's honor can be directed to the ["UC Riverside Foundation, Mike Murphy Endowed Field Studies Fund."](#)



This message was sent on behalf of the Coast Geological Society



## COAST GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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