

# Rancho Mastatal Updates

---

## February 2009

We get a vast amount of amazing letters, notes, correspondence and gifts from former guests and interns as well as from friends throughout the year. We're not always able to reciprocate your generosity due to our sometimes-overwhelming Ranch schedule and for that we are sincerely apologetic. You all mean a great deal to us, the Ranch and the community of Mastatal and your love for this place and its people does not go unnoticed even when we are unable to write you a personal note.

I realize that a blanket "thank you" is no way to show our gratitude but for now it's the best that we can do. The list of folks to reply to is growing uncontrollably. So, thanks to all of you out there for all of your openhandedness, kindness and charity. We sincerely could not do what we do without you. The dry season continues to roll on by with this being the driest that many locals and we have ever seen. Thankfully we got our first rain in almost nine weeks on March 12 and then a bit more the following day. The much-needed precipitation is providing moisture for the thirsty forest and keeping down the dust in the streets to a minimum, at least for now. It's high time to start thinking about planting beans and afternoon trips to the clothesline to bring in drying garments from the afternoon showers.

We've had a wonderful beginning to 2009 highlighted by a fantastic intern crew, lots of success on the soccer field, bountiful inspiring projects, and a host of excellent groups. We took a much needed rest to Esterillos Este on the Central Pacific Coast in early March after a non-stop three-month stint with back-to-back-to-back workshops and groups. We thoroughly enjoyed the surf, beach soccer, countless volleyball games, cold beers, relaxed reading and great company. The winter, or summer as it's called locally, plans to get even better with St. Patty's Day, Yestermorrow, March Madness (which will follow as closely as we can without a television) and the 1st Annual Cork Summer Music Festival just around the corner.

This month's update includes:

[RM Program News](#): Rancho Mastatal Music CD Update

[Building Report](#): Starboard Cork: All Hands on Deck

[Conservation Report](#): Waddlin' Fool



*Sole and Anna*

**Community Facts/Stories:** Over the River and Through the Woods

**Intern/Guest Gossip:** Winter Interns

**Comida Corner:** Starfruit Cobbler

**Fútbol Follies:** Respect

**Inspirational Impressions:** Reflet d'un instant



*Ty and Sparky with a New Release*

### **RM Program News: Rancho Mastatal Music CD Update**

A few months back we started production of a Rancho Mastatal music CD, which, when completed, will be sold as a means of raising money for the Mastatal Charitable Foundation. The plan is to make a compilation CD of songs performed by former interns, volunteers, Mastatal locals, or anyone whose music has been played and enjoyed at the Ranch. So far we've had plenty of interest from folks who have previously recorded music and would like to be represented on the CD. Previous interns and Ranch music entertainers AARON WESTGATE, ANYA

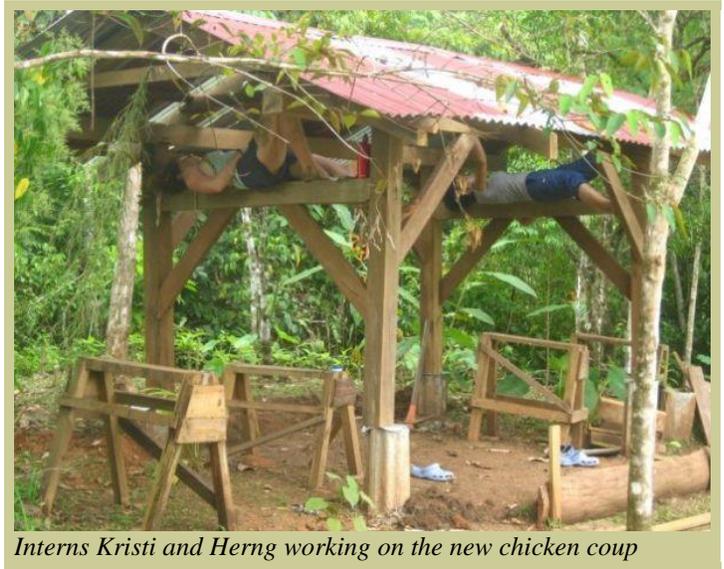
ROSE, and DEIVIS "DEIVITO" GARCIA have submitted two songs each. I will also be adding a song or two and TYLER SEE and SPARKY will be adding songs soon. Thanks to Jersey JENN SCHWARTZ who has offered her graphics skills to produce the CD through an environmentally responsible company.

If you're a musician who has played music at the Ranch and have your music recorded and would like to be considered for the CD, please contact us! Ideally, but not limited to music that was written at, inspired by, or performed frequently at Rancho Mastatal, would be preferred. This is a great opportunity to have your music heard by lots of people, while also providing funds for a great cause. For more information about the Mastatal Charitable Foundation check their website at <http://www.mastate-foundation.org> and send your recordings to me, Sucia, at [Alansmith101@gmail.com](mailto:Alansmith101@gmail.com)

Sucia

## **Building Report:Starboard Cork: All Hands on Deck**

Starboard Cork, the building project headed up by Geoff, Tyler and I, is moving along rapidly, thanks to the dedication, hard work, and variety of skills and artistic influences from a brilliant and incredibly fun bunch of winter interns. When we arrived in January the frame of the common space had one completed wattle and daub wall. Since then the amount of progress that has been made is far beyond our expectations and it is probable that The Cork will be at least partially used as a living space within a few months and will certainly be lived in by next winter. There have been a few weeks where five different projects were taking place at once at the Cork site, and being there has been an amazing experience. Now as we take our mid internship break on the beautiful ocean sands of Esterillos Este, and reenergize to return to the Cork project, here is an outline of where we stand at the moment.



*Interns Kristi and Herng working on the new chicken coup*

The shared living space has been completely framed out and waddled and daubed. Geoff and I have framed out and waddled the walls. I headed up the daubing and all of our amazing interns have gotten their feet and hands in the poo, clay sand and straw, stomping, making bricks and applying the cob into the waddled walls. MAXINE, TIMO, RED, CAROLINE, SPARKY, NATE, NICOLE, JODEE, JOHN, SAM, BRITT, ERIN and ANNE and visiting temporary interns, SIM and STEVE, have all spent endless hours integrating the world's oldest natural building material into the walls of this magical structure. Thanks to ROJO, (Red) who I have personally spent several days with working the daub and sharing some of the best stories and experiences of my life.

With the help of NICOLE, JODEE is heading up an Octopus sculpture on one of the inside walls of the shared living space. Why an Octopus? The Cork is an ode to a song written by a great Ranch friend, DEIVITO GARCIA, and performed and recorded by our band THE PORCHISTAS. The full story of Starboard Cork will be in next month's newsletter. With the cob-sculpted octopus, lime plastered and washed with ocher tinted lime, Jodee has meshed her weird, mesmerizing, original style of art and painting into the walls of The Cork. The shared living space only awaits a few more walls of lime plaster, a few doors, a cob floor and a Starboard Cork stained glass window that I'm putting together back in the Jerze.

With input from GEOFF and TYLER, and lots of hands-on help from many other interns, ANNE and ERIN have headed up and constructed the entire foundation of the Cork's future composting toilet and shower. The toilet will be a "vault" system similar to the one at the HANKEY HOUSE, and the shower will be an undetermined passive solar design. ERIN and ANNE's attention and commitment to the project have been AWESOME! They've both taken their Yestermorrow developed skills to a new level. Now they're working on adding a timber frame structure to the foundation. Thanks ERIN and ANNE! Your positive energy and commitment to The Cork pooper

and shower are inspiring.

TAGGERT is making a finely crafted hardwood countertop with a wide oval shaped sink insert out of a concrete mortar mix, perfectly fitted into the stone-floored room that provides cover for the main entry to the house. Thanx TAGS!

Evidence of GRANDELÓN'S (Geoff) stonemason skills is all around the CORK site. Legendary rock runs have been made by Geoff, Sam, Taggert and others, providing material for giant floor stones and a small, stone topped cement block wall completing the front porch area. The beefy pillars, holding up the two cabinas, and the hefty block wall at the base of the common space, give Starboard Cork a kickass foundation. With help from Alex, Grandelón has run water to the Cork site, bringing us a step closer to a fully functioning house.

TYLER has led just about all aspects of the frames of the two cabinas. The rooms, extending from each end of the common space lay about 12' square with tongue and groove teak floors on top of beefcake floor joists. Last week with a full Ranch crew present, we raised GEOFF's timberframed cabina. The other side, now being laid out by TY STICK, should be up and roofed in the coming weeks. The CORK would not be anywhere near the reality that it currently is without the skill set, the tireless care and commitment of TYLER. You the man MISTER SEE.

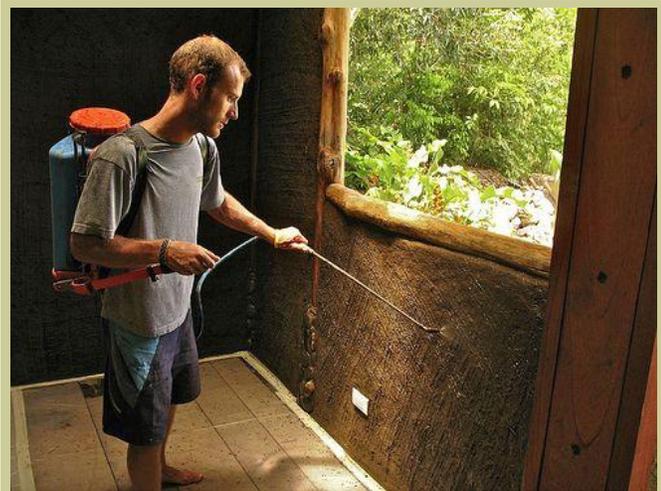
NATE is out of control excited about his current art project, which will fill a swath of the common space, high above the cob floor hanging below the gable timberframe roof. The hanging light/sculpting will be based with two pieces of long, hearty driftwood that Nate-Dawg, with the help of several interns, hauled off the sands of Esterillos. The sculpting which will incorporate natural objects from the Mastatal area, along with coastal remnants to represent the oceanic feel of the song, is already feeling like one of NATE'S many thoughtful artistic masterpieces. We feel stoked and privileged to have so many artists seeing their visions come into being through our walls.

Whether he is stomping a cob mix, rapidly turning a batch of concrete, giving advice, or applying a poo shmeer, Timo's presence at the cork work site is priceless. When he is able to pull away from the daily grind of the Ranch and get his hands into the Cork, the pace at which things happens becomes mystifying. His combination of knowledge, expertise and mule-like work ethic has greatly moved along the amount of time it has taken to bring us to where we are. Besides that, everything just becomes more fun when T is around the site. From the name game to conversations about poop, life and work become more enjoyable when Timo is working with us. And Robin's timely presence overseeing the mixtures and application of the natural materials going into and on the walls has ensured straight, strong, beautiful cob and lime walls that will provide decades of enjoyment and loving memories.

I am sorry to everyone I haven't mentioned. So many selfless, skilled caring hands go into the Cork walls everyday it's hard to remember them in a brief article. But people like Nate, Max, David, John, Red and many many others, who do whatever is asked of them to make work at the Cork go along smoothly, there aren't words to express our appreciation for your work.

Lastly, but mostly, Skip and Lizabeth. This structure was built because of your tutelage, and commitment to the idea of natural building. We love you both for helping us make this building what it is today. Yestermorrow rocks. You rock! Thanks to all.

Con amor, Sucia



*Rog watering the manure plaster at the choza*

### **Conservation Report: Waddlin' Fool**

This is a song written at the cork site with the help of ANNA MCEVOY and Geoff Kinder. Obviously inspired by our time making the walls go up! Chords and melody available if requested. It might be a bit of a stretch to fit this into the Conservation Report, but we like to think that earth building does its part to conserve our planet. And this song is a tribute to building with mud and shit. Thanks! Sucia

### **Waddlin' Fool**

I'm a waddling fool

Machete's my only tool  
Gonna build me a house  
Outta poo and bamboo

The days are hot and long  
While I'm singin' this song  
Gotta waddle my daub  
Gonna stomp me some cob

*(Chorus)*

I'm a waddling fool  
Time is on my side  
Grow my food from seed  
My clock's the moon and the tide

I'm a waddling fool  
Get my shade from the trees  
Dig my clay from the ground  
Build these walls from my knees

*(instrumental)*

Macaws fly high above  
The jungle symphony  
Sweat is burnin' my eyes

Flies are stingin' my feet

And as the days go bye  
This house it grows from the ground  
And as the walls come along  
Finally home I have found

*(repeat chorus)*

### **Community Facts/Stories: Over the River and Through the Woods**

Rancho Mastatal started out the Winter 2009 Internship with a bang...that is, the combined banging of hammers, nails and cob stomping all of which has culminated into yet another successful community development project. A hearty recognition of gratitude must be paid to the Mastate Charitable Foundation and the hard working Mastatalians, San Vicentians and Ranch residents without whom this project would not have been possible.

To set the stage, let's start with the work completed by the Solar Energy International (SEI) group that welcomed in the New Year at the Ranch. The SEI group worked intensely over 10 days to install solar panels and related electrical systems in two homes in the community that had previously been living without electricity and running water. The home belonging to Ana and Juan Luis in San Vicente became of particular interest.

Ana and Juan Luis live on an isolated cow pasture in a stick frame house set upon the scenic mountainside of San Vicente. This hardworking family spends part of their time in San José where Juan Luis works as a security guard and gardener and the other part of the week, he works as a cattle rancher and subsistence farmer. This family made the decision to leave the convenience of more developed living arrangements so they could put their resources towards sending their daughter to a boarding school in Puriscal. As a result of their move, they sacrificed the niceties of electricity, running water, walls, cooking gas and connection to community resources.

Ranch Interns Erin, Britt, Taggert and Caroline engaged in a great opportunity to create a relationship with an amazing family while introducing them to sustainable resources that would improve their health and quality of life. Interns met with the family in their home to follow up after the SEI installation. We were greeted by Ana who introduced to her concerns and proposed a few improvements, namely, increased protection from the torrential downpours of the rainy season and privacy for her teenage daughter who, at that point, had been sleeping in the open corridor of the second story on a hammock. On the first floor, concerns arose with Ana's kitchen. She spoke of troubles with ventilation and respiration while working over an open fire to prepare meals for her family.

We devoured this information, stewing and steaming with possibilities, creative building designs all the while improving the quality of life and health of this family which whom we would come to develop a friendship. After several meetings with Ana and Juan Luis and the sage expertise of Timo y Robin, our intern group devised a simple and effective design plan to mejorar la situación. Our design was to basically develop the upper level of the house which introduced the following

improvements: build four full walls framing one existing bedroom and a new was to be built and two half walls to maintain the incredible view of La Cangreja and the flow of cool mountain breezes. ¡Que rico verdad!

In the kitchen, Estufa Rocky, aka The Rocket Stove was the big winner as an accessible resource for improving ventilation while maintaining traditional cooking methods used over an open fire. What is a Rocket Stove you ask? Well basically, we constructed a double burner stovetop out of two sheet metal elbows packed tightly with cob and adorned tenderly with a spirit tree and stones. In order to use the Rocket Stove, place a few thin pieces of wood on a shelf in the lower portion of the elbow, light the ends of the wood and shove the pieces through the lower elbow into the center of the chimney until there is a strong flame. With improved ventilation and insulation from the cob, a convection process is created and results in a clean burning fire that heats up quickly, maintains energy and conserves fuel. Reduced smoke, increased fuel efficiency, sustainable and custom made---what more could a chef ask for? (Later we visited for them and enjoyed a delicious lunch that was cooked entirely with the newly installed stove).

The hike up to the house was always eventful in one way or another. A 30-minute hike through pasture that turns into jungle will take you directly to their home. The trail is beautiful, even with a ton of wood and tools packed on our backs, which happened more time than many of us would like to recount as we prepared materials for the project. Strong like ox, we are. Throughout our many hikes to their home, we ran into Coatis, Iguanas, Jesus Christ lizards (it appears to walk on water) and a huge Terciopelo snake skeleton. Something that we certainly missed after the big windstorm was the trail, which we found completely littered with downed trees and jungle debris. For us this meant a full day of trail maintenance the week before the big work weekend.

Over the course of several weeks of trekking up to Anna's for planning and relationship building, we were treated to all sorts of unexpected comidas típicas,. Some of our favorites were Coco con Miel served on banana leaves, Chan; a sweet drink made with black seeds encased in a gelatinous shell, red beans with green plantains, pork, chicken, pinto, picadillo con papas y chorizo and tortillas made by hand. We also learned new vocabulary words like "toro" to replace butchered Spanish versions ("vaca hombre" kept us laughing for weeks).

Ranch inters were thankful to have the vibrant energy and work ethic of students attending the Aerie Back Country Medicine EMT course. Students and Interns teamed up over Valentines Day weekend and worked their medically-trained-studiously-drained butts off. Saturday's crew hauled an obscene amount of wood and tools up to the house, and went to work with gusto, deconstructing the existing stove and dancing up a cob mix for the new one. The wall crew got into a rhythmic groove of measuring, cutting, joking and hammering. Juan Luis and Ana were immensely helpful with obtaining supplies, sawing boards and ensured that the work could flow smoothly. Sunday's rocket stove crew sat in a circle around the stove, cobbing and singing the day away. By the end of the weekend, over half the work had been completed, and Dr. Love had volunteered to build shutters for one of the new windows. Ana repeatedly expressed their gratitude. After two more days of work the following week by Ranch volunteers and interns (many thanks to Alan, Anne, Jodee, Nicole, John and Sam), both building projects were not only completed but also loving infused with details (characteristic of the work completed by the Ranch) like the smoothly sanded Guanacaste

window sills upstairs, the live wood window-shutter handle and the spirit tree sculpted into the cob surface of the rocket stove.

*Un mil gracias otra vez a* the Mastate Charitable Foundation for funding the project, and to all the Aerie students and Ranch regulars who flexed their muscles to go over the river and through the woods to Juan and Ana's. Britt and Erin

### **Intern/Guest Gossip: Winter Interns**

JODEE ADAMS MOORE, SAM KRAFT, NICOLE ESCLAMADO, ERIN CAMPBELL, CAROLYN PANZARELLA, BRITT WILEY, RED FEOLA, ANNE MARIE FLEUSCH and TAGGERT EDWARDS make up this winter's wonderful dynamic intern crew. Long-time visitors SUCIA, GRANDELÓN, T-BONE, MAXINE, NATE and SPARKS, round out the group. We're having an amazing and productive season. On the docket this winter have been innumerable inspirational projects with the Cork and the Cork's newly designed composting toilet and shower construction leading the way. Britt, Erin, Taggart and Carolyn have been heading up a wonderful community project that has resulted in a new efficient earthen stove and walls for a needy family in San Vicente. Nicole and Red have been keeping the gardens green and alive while Sam is getting the worms' home back in order. Nicole has also been working with Carolyn teaching in both the elementary and telesecundaria schools. Jodee and Taggart have had their hands in innumerable projects including a sink and beautiful lime relief at the Cork, some of the yummiest granola on the planet, a rocket stove for a local family, and countless, scrumptious meals for the Ranch. Anne Marie and Erin have had their hands and heads into more projects than space allows here including heading up the construction of the new composting toilet and shower at the Cork and much more. And without going into too much detail, Tyler, Grandelón, Nate, Sparks, Maxine and Sucia have worked their magic for yet another winter. The most amazing group of well-rounded, hilarious, caring and wonderful people as has ever been assembled on this planet. It would take a book to mention everything that's been going on since early January so far now, I'll leave it at that. You can read up more on a few of the aforementioned projects in other entries in this newsletter.

Unbelievably, this internship is coming to a quick end. It's been one of the most industrious and fruitful on record and certainly the group dynamic has been amazingly tight for a group this large. It's a real tribute to the quality of the people that we've had here to start out the year. They've set the bar scarily high for future interns. The winter has flown by faster than any other that I can remember. Thank you to everyone that has made this an unforgettable few months.

### **Comida Corner: Starfruit Cobbler**

What do you do when your starfruit trees are dripping with this celestial fruit? Here is a tropical recipe for those rhubarb pie lovers with a basket of starfruit on their hands.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees

1 ½ cups whole-wheat flour

1/3 cup sugar

½ tsp baking soda  
½ tsp salt  
6 tbs cold butter cut into small pieces  
½ cup buttermilk (regular milk will do too)  
½ tsp vanilla

Mix dry ingredients. Add butter cutting into mix with a fork until the mix is evenly crumbled. Add vanilla. Add milk a little at a time until mixture holds together when squeezed by hand (but not overly wet). Roll mixture onto a lightly floured cutting board to 1/8th" thick. Cut into inch long strips. Set aside.

10 to 15 starfruit cut into thin slices  
½ cup raisins  
½ cup *tapa dulce* or maple syrup  
2 eggs, beaten  
1 tsp cornstarch  
1 tsp cinnamon

Mix together all ingredients, saving some of the beaten egg, and pour into an 8x10 inch pan. Lay crust strips on top into whatever design you like. (I cut my dough into stars last time (!cheesy!). Brush dough with beaten egg and sprinkle with sugar. Bake for 20 minutes or until the crust corners turn a golden brown. Cool and serve with *helado*.

### **F?tbol Follies : Respect**

Tight and starchy as they may be, the black and yellow were a pleasure to wear in February. With four convincing victories and two competitive ties in six games, the new look Galácticos have been gaining some serious momentum, not to mention local and, recently, regional respect. The word is out, thanks in large part to the addition of our friend, colleague and promoter GINO from Guarumal. Teams from across Puriscal County and beyond have been contacting the Galácticos looking for some fresh action. All of a sudden midweek games were the norm, and pretty soon Mastatal was playing in conditions they had never before experienced – under the lights.



*Guarumal Soccer*

Our first evening encounter took place in the bajos of Gamalotillo, the last pueblo in Puriscal before the coast and previous site of Guarumal's championship victory a number of years back. The red pickup carried just enough for one substitute and two dedicated fans, whose excited cheers got the players pumped from the outset. The first half featured numerous opportunities on goal for the Galácticos, with GRANDELÓN sitting pretty back in their own net. A few key saves was all he

needed to stave off the opponents' attack. Impressed by their own ball control and teamwork, the amarillos took advantage of the flat, wide field, going into halftime with a 1-0 lead thanks to superstriker ROJO. The first five minutes of the second half followed suit, with four quick opportunities displaying the Galácticos' dominance. Soon thereafter, however, the match was suspended due to a serious high shin injury to JUAN LUIS, the victim of an unwarranted plancheta that sent him and the rest of the team back to the Cruz Roja in La Gloria. Seven stitches and a night in the hospital resulted for the Mastatal veteran, who has since carried on leading the way from the sidelines.

The rest of the week saw the Galácticos playing five undefeated matches in eight days, culminating with much fanfare in another night game in San Antonio de Tulín. The bigger fields seemingly playing to Mastatal's advantage, this was rightfully hyped as one of the bigger matches in Galáctico history. Players and fans traveled by minibus and pickup the hour-long journey to the lowlands, where a team unaccustomed to losing on their home pitch awaited. Dominating ball possession and shots on goal, Mastatal came out firing, securing a 3-0 lead at halftime with goals from JUNIOR and ROJO. Second half fouls and yellow cards couldn't stop the yellow wave, and after 90 minutes it was a glorious 5-1 Galáctico victory. The excitement and highs felt on the field and in the bleachers that night are potentially unparalleled for many. Thank you to all who came out.

Can the Galácticos ride out this success in March? Stay tuned for more Fútbol Follies.



### **Inspirational Impressions: Reflet d'un instant**

*Des masques bleus  
Azuls, d'un gris sombre  
Un soupir, un visage  
Un silence, une ombre  
On emporte son être avec soi  
Qu'on aille ici ou là-bas...  
Les nuages s'effacent  
Reste l'essence  
Une vague intérieure*

*Legerte qui balance  
Dans ma chaise a bascule  
Je retrouve l'equilibre  
Heureuse d'etre montee a bord  
L'horizon prolonge le decors...*

Why accumulate when there is so much joy in giving? \* Shaker expression\*  
Thank you Mastatal for everything you bring to all of us!

--- Sofi

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew