

Rancho Mastatal Updates

April 2009

Rancho Mastatal UPDATE for the month of April 2009. The first three months of any year at the Ranch are bound for hitting high in the history books; that's just how the schedule works out. The workshops, the people, the weather – all factors that contribute to the burst of progress seen around the grounds. During this period of achievement and activity, we all learn to feed off each other's energy and creativity, resulting in an explosion of expression not soon forgotten. This year was no exception, thanks in large part to a determined and cohesive intern crew, the support of more than a handful of

seasoned veterans, and of course the daily inspiration that is Sole. As the 2009 summer season wound down into its final month, the Ranch found itself having to both switch production into overdrive and say goodbye to more and more of its critical labor force and close friends. We did our best to capture those special moments in time, and many will remain with us forever, though the reasons for it all coming together the way it did may never be fully understood.

So here we go with a look at April, most likely with hints of March and May in the mix. After a while it's all a blur anyway. With that, we invite you to enjoy the season, whatever yours may be.

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Timo and Sole share a moment at the ranch

photo by Ian Woofenden



*The new shower house at Rancho Mastatal
photo by Ian Woofenden*

RM Program News: Return of the Purple Huskies
Every April for the past seven years, a small group of young adults escapes the drizzles of Seattle for the deluge of the rainforest. The first month is the biggest, getting to know the place, the people, the system. Finding a groove that works, getting around whatever doesn't. Then, as soon as you think you might have a handle on it, it's time for a 5-day field trip. Yet that's what it takes to truly appreciate this place and that's almost always what happens with the UW students. This year has shown the makings of a similar scenario. Susan's latest group made short order of breaking the ice and diving right into their new home. Whether with each other or the entire

ranch community, the group's energy was at a high level in the early stages, plenty of smiling, storytelling and even practical joking with practical strangers. For the rest of us, it has been a pleasure to have the students around and hear about and share in their goings-on (More on their independent projects next month.) We also want to send a special thanks to SUSAN and DAVID for keeping things smooth for both the students and the Ranch. We look forward to having the group settle into the rest of their time in Mastatal, as I'm sure many of them are, too.



A member of a visiting school group enjoys a refreshing dip beneath the falls in the swimming hole by the ranch.

photo by Taylor LaBarr

Conservation Report: Birds of a Feather Poop Together

After weeks and months of anticipation, they are finally here. Thirty-two laying hens arrived in April, the realization of an ongoing dream for food production at the Ranch. The *gallinas* ("pio, pio, pio") moved right into their timber frame home over at the Kevin F. Costner, a chicken coop for the ages. While one chick succumbed to the rainforest in its backyard, all the rest began to feed and grow. Quickly. So quickly that attention was needed on a number of fronts, including water and feed management, roosting and pile-up zones, points of escape, and overall hen morale. As chicken maintenance has become a daily chore at the Ranch, our relationship with the birds has deepened, setting in motion a commitment to their well-being and our eventual profit. The latter, however, is not fully achieved for two or three months, at which point the unfertilized eggs will in theory start showing up. Our egg consumption being what it is, on-site production will certainly boost our supply, though is not likely to entirely wipe out input from other local providers. What it does mean is a further step towards "doing the sustainable."

Since the chickens' arrival, attention has also shifted ever so slightly back to Bandito's garden, where greens such as katuk are being planted for the birds' direct consumption. (They now roam joyous and free during the day and reliably seek shelter in the evenings). As you sit at the nearly finished garden wall, agricultural visions abound, and hopes and dreams for more extensive and integrated production continue to develop. There's talk of a goat next, as well as dozens of possibilities in the gardens. For now, the chickens are a good visual reminder of what's to come. And the rains are an inescapable reminder to keep planting. With that, the last month and a half has seen a lot of fruit trees, tubers and greens go in the ground. As we watch more and more what the earth can provide, we take heed not to forgo her offerings. The momentum is on for a paradigm shift in the coming months and years, but conveniently we've made giant steps to get the ranch ready. *Gracias a la Madre* indeed.



New chicken house at Rancho Mastatal.

photo by Ian Woofenden

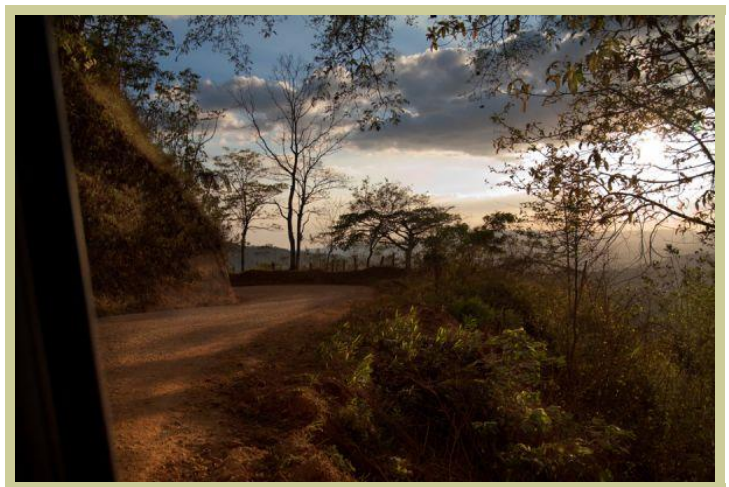
Building Report: Is It Done Yet?

As the story goes, news from the building world remains positive and promising. With numbers dropping by the week, focus at the Cork has tapered with time, though the remaining tasks continue to see steady attention. Though unable to erect the second bedroom prior to GEOFF's departure, as originally hoped, those of us who stayed on had her up and roofed in a few days time. In those same days the shitter rafters and roof flew together, followed by a matching entrance awning by ERIN. With all major roofs on and the rains around the corner, securing the perimeter became the next major task, while AL began interior framing in the

second bedroom. The first looks excellent, smeared, cleaned up and ready for plaster. Proximity to livability tightens as CHRIS moves along on the bed.

Elsewhere, bodies were spared and provided for repairs persisting from the February windstorm. Structures such as the vivero, neighboring compost shed and the secador took a big hit, but with the work of GREG, ALEX, JUNIOR and numerous students and volunteers, all three are back up and running. Junior has enjoyed a solid spell of working in the building realm with his older brother, learning and diversifying his portfolio. The two work well together, take pride in their production and are indispensable to the ranch.

Meanwhile, Greg miraculously finds time to touch up the new bodega floor, which now sports a handsome sheen, ready for the next step. Planning and designing is underway for the workbench, while DAVID plugs away in his half minutes of free time on the door. With all these advancements we move closer to the big move. All part of a larger web of preparations for the future. And we thought these were the glory days.



Intern/Guest Gossip: Whirlwind Week

Vista along the road to Mastatal

photo by Taylor LaBarr

It was possibly one of the busiest, most frantic, creative, celebratory and emotional

weeks in recent Ranch history. The April Fool's Day departure of SAMUEL, a.k.a. Gary, was the first of many anticipated but dreaded windlings of an all-star intern crew over the course of the month. But this was indeed no joke – people's presence or lack thereof was duly noted as numbers and energy shifted with each loss. In an attempt to take full advantage of the group as a whole, on the heels of UW's arrival, motions were made for an ambitious slew of projects and events.

Following the timely discovery of the ranch video camera, Sparky and Maxine began preparations for multiple film projects, including the Ranch Orientation video, the "Zombie Eyes" music video and the beginnings of Sole's Fable. With so many people bursting with talent and ingenuity, the latter production quickly turned into something reminiscent of a major motion picture, complete with homemade costumes, original music, creative camerawork and a well-rounded storyline full of magical, imagined and real characters. With a concerted effort by all, and the touch of a master editor, enough scenes were compiled for a captivating sneak peek trailer. Coming 2009.

Not to be short of group activities, the crew embarked on a busy weekend, having to make critical choices in the interest of time. A *frabado noche* rodeo in Montelimar won out over an impromptu lip sync, which turned out to be a scene of great social, cultural and dramatic proportions for those who stayed. The following day would be the last for two more all-star interns, BRITT and ANNE, and luckily for them, it was by all means a big one. An outstanding invitation for Frisbee in the city was turned down, yielding instead to the fourth annual Sir Roger Whalley Day. Our numbers were good and spirits full for a proper celebration, though not before raising the frame of the Cork shitter that morning. As the bents assembled and the pegs pounded home, weeks and months of drawings, meetings, math and cutting really paid off nicely for ERIN, ANNE and all the supporting cast. A successful Saturday half-day in the books, holiday festivities rightfully began following a hearty lunch at the Ranch.

Four randomly selected yet surprisingly comparable teams participated in this year's Roger Day events, which included the traditional relay race, egg toss, weak-foot kickball, Frisbee, and fútbol down on the plaza. It was a long afternoon, with good patience and participation from all, but the day would not end there. Following a short break and refreshment run, the evening session commenced with a first-ever trifecta of wildcard horseshoes, ping-pong and Pictionary. Competition was tight throughout the day, with the camisola and bandana-laden DidgereeDADEdoos taking top place by three points. Most importantly, though, the spirit of Sir Roger filled the air, reminding us of those values of kindness, sportsmanship and happiness that he carries so well.

The goodbyes kept coming that week, the loss of GEOFF and SPARKY being one of the biggest. Their final night coincided with ROBIN's birthday celebration, a musical gathering of friends who didn't know the next time they'd all be together. Many believe it will be sooner rather than later.

It has been an eventful, diverse, exceptionally creative winter at the Ranch, with more original songs written than ever before (which are now able to be recorded forever), a social schedule leaving little time for rest, and incredible progress in Ranch and community projects. While these

tangibles will remind us of our time here, the camaraderie and friendships will stay with us wherever we go.

Community Facts/Stories: First Annual Spring Equinox Starboard Cork Festival of Talents

A vision that Timo has shared with me many times over the past three years has finally come to fruition. The idea of a sunset music festival at the Ranch has been something that he has hoped to see happen. That vision is now a reality, and those of us who were lucky enough to be involved, whether performing or in the audience, all feel like we were a part of a magical afternoon and evening.



The school house in the village of Mastatal

photo by Taylor LaBarr

The Cork Festival, which took place on March 20, the eve of the spring equinox, was announced and organized about two weeks prior. Within days, secret rehearsals began taking place in every nook and cranny of the pueblo of Mastatal. Echoes and harmonies were heard during what seemed like every lunch hour, post dinner, late evening, and early morning, as all of the winter interns tightened up their acts and fine-tuned their guitar parts and vocal chords. For two weeks Rancho Mastatal was an explosion of performance-creativity. Costumes were made. Sets were designed. Amazing songs were written and practiced steadily. It was the greatest artistic burst that I have ever been a part of, and it culminated on a beautiful Friday afternoon on the front deck of the house shaped like a boat that was being built by all of the same interns who were performing. The deck was the stage. The common space was filled with wood plank benches for the audience who watched the acts take place with the most beautiful back drop one could imagine: the La Cangreja mountain range. GRANDULON spent hours cleaning the work site making it ready for a show. He also bartended in classic Geoff fashion: scantily clad in a pair of "Banana Split" booty shorts and a Spongebob necktie.

SPARKY helped me MC the event. ROBIN opened up a poem by Wendell Berry called Darker Circles of Return. TY and I then briefly thanked everyone for their hard work through the season, then performed on guitar and sang a song called Red is Back that we wrote for our great friend ROJO, who was greatly missed while he was away from the ranch for a few weeks.

RED then performed three original songs - Blueberry Picking (with TY and AL), a song called Mother that he wrote for his Mom and dedicated to Robin for the show, and I See Red, an instrumental with TY. LIZABETH from Yestermorrow followed with a masterful Ode to Coffee, a poem about her worship for the lovely bean beverage.

Next up was an amazing harmonized singing performance by the Barbed Wire Fence Jumping Mountainside Sitting Single String Angelic Quintet. ERIN led the group on acoustic guitar. CAROLYN, ERIN, ANNE, BRITT AND NICOLE, rotated lead vocals on each verse then shared

choruses of the song Angel from Montgomery. The performance left goose bumps on many an arm. ERIN then mesmerized the crowd with a beautiful cover of the Avett Brothers song called Murder in the City.

MATTHEW from the Yestermorrow Natural Building class followed with an enthusiastically delivered, self-written poem. Next to the stage was a mystery act entitled My Pet Pega. It turned out to be ANNE and JODEE struggling not to dissolve into a collective puddle of laughter as they performed an interpretive version of the popular showtune If I Were a Rich Man. The theatrics continued with an equally hilarious skit by NICOLE, JOHNNY GOMA, BRITT and BEN, a.k.a. The Good Times, which most notably involved orange juggling, a tricycle and bare male midriffs.

To end the first half of the evening, TIMO played two songs on his teeny guitar, one sung to SOLE to the tune of Hush Little Baby, with the following line drawing the most applause from the crowd: "If that hand-thrown cup breaks to pieces, Poppa's gonna build you a vault to catch your feces." TIMO closed with his Walking Down the Road to the Cork, an ode to the festival and all the hard working hands at the Ranch.

All enjoyed a brief intermission as the sun set behind the stage. With bottles of Imperial Silver (the official sponsor of the festival) and glasses of homemade mead in hand, the audience settled back in to enjoy the first performance of the second act, a beautifully backlit puppet show orchestrated by RACHEL and TAGGERT with musical accompaniment by ROJO and TYLER, entitled An Epic Tale of the High Seas and the Misadventures Therein. NATE followed as The Great Payaso, thrilling the crowd with some audience involvement in his phenomenal mime act.

Brujita and Friends then took the stage for three songs, an interpretively danced remix of Madonna's Like a Virgin, and two originals written in Seattle, When I Saw U and Linda Lee. SPARKY, as part of Esparky Dooby Doo and his Shaggy Amigos, followed with his Chitchen Itza and his and ROJO's White Balloon, the latter brilliantly interpretive danced by GRANDULON. SUCIA, in the penultimate act, sang Waddlin' Fool, a doo-wop tune in which saucy backup singers ANNE, CAROLYN and ERIN stole the show, the now-classic Los Pescadores de Puntarenas, and finally, the ever-popular Starboard Cork, a song about a house shaped like a boat made out of cork, the inspiration for the structure where we all sat. AL, RED and TY finished off the evening with their Flamenco Farewell/Ode to Sole, in which their strings aptly expressed the hazy happiness and gratitude we were all feeling.

Living up to all the hype and beyond, this was a truly inspiring event that catapulted the ranch into a solid two months of creative outbursts. Now, the singing, acting, and artistic expression will continue as we eagerly anticipate and prepare for next year's festival.

Comida Corner: Soughdough Calzones

Inspired by fellow Jerseyites MAX and AL with a kick in the pants from the GODMOTHER. This one is from The Cheese Board in Berkeley, CA. You'll need some sourdough starter for the dough and can adjust your filler ingredients to your liking. Enjoy the calzone.

Pizza Dough: Makes 3 10-in. pizza crusts

3 – 3¼ cups (15 – 16 oz) bread flour

1½ cups cool water

1½ teaspoons salt

½ cup (4 oz) sourdough starter

Put three cups of the flour in the bowl of a stand mixer or a large bowl. If using a stand mixer, add the water to the bowl and mix on low speed with the paddle attachment until the ingredients are thoroughly combined, about 3 minutes. Let rest for 10 minutes. Add the salt and sourdough starter. Switch to the dough hook, increase the mixer speed to minimum, and knead for 12 minutes, or until the dough is slightly tacky and soft. (After a couple minutes, the dough should gather around the hook; you can add extra flour by the tablespoon if the dough does not pull away from the sides of the bowl.) Transfer to a lightly floured surface and knead by hand for about 5 minutes, or until the dough is smooth, shiny and passes the windowpane test.

If making by hand, add the water to the bowl and mix with a wooden spoon until the ingredients are thoroughly combined. Let rest for 10 minutes. Add the salt and sourdough starter and mix until all the ingredients are combined. Transfer to a lightly floured surface and knead for 15 minutes, adding flour by the tablespoonful as necessary to keep the dough from sticking. The kneading is complete when the dough is smooth, shiny, and passes the windowpane test.

Form the dough into a ball and place it in a large oiled bowl. Turn the dough over to coat it with oil. Cover the bowl with a damp kitchen towel and let rise in a cool place for 6 to 8 hours, or until the dough is doubled in size. Or, put the dough into the refrigerator and let it rise overnight; the next day, let it stand at room temperature for 2 hours before proceeding with the recipe.

Calzones: Makes 8 calzones

3 cloves garlic, minced

5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

½ yellow onion, finely chopped

¼ teaspoon salt

Pinch of freshly ground black pepper

10 oz baby spinach, washed

1 recipe sourdough pizza dough

Fine yellow cornmeal or flour for sprinkling

2 cups (8 oz) shredded Mozzarella cheese

4 oz fresh goat cheese

¼ cup loosely packed basil leaves, coarsely chopped (optional)

Add/subtract whatever fillings you like, including caramelized onions, roasted garlic, etc.

Arrange the oven racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven. Preheat the oven to 450°F. If using a baking stone, place it on the floor of the oven and preheat the oven for 45 minutes.

In a small bowl, combine one-third of the garlic with 3 tablespoons of the olive oil. Set aside.

In a heavy medium skillet, combine the onion and the remaining garlic with the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil, salt and pepper and cook over medium heat for 5 minutes, or until lightly browned. Let cool.

Put the spinach in a large saucepan, cover, and cook on low heat for 5 minutes, or just long enough to wilt the spinach. Drain any excess liquid. Let cool.

Transfer the dough to a lightly floured surface and divide it into 8 pieces. Gently form each piece into a loose round and cover with a floured kitchen towel. Let rest for 20 minutes. Sprinkle 2 baking sheets with cornmeal. Pull and pat the dough into 8 disks, each about 7 inches in diameter.

Evenly divide the onion mixture, spinach, Mozzarella, and goat cheese among the 8 rounds, filling only one side of each round and leaving a ½-inch rim. With a pastry brush, lightly paint the rim of each round with water. Fold the round in half, turn the bottom lip over the top lip, and pinch the edges together. Brush the top of the calzones with 2 tablespoons of the garlic oil. Place 4 calzones on each baking sheet.

Using a single-edge razor, slash each calzone once with a short diagonal slash. Bake the calzones for 10 minutes. Rotate the pans front to back and trade their rack positions. Bake 10 minutes longer, or until golden brown with a firm bottom.

Remove from the oven and brush with the remaining garlic oil. Garnish with the basil.

Note: Cooking the vegetables while the pizza dough is rising will allow time for them to cool before handling.



*nate, sucia, maxine, anna, maria, geoff, sparky, justin, prepping
cob bricks to daub the cork walls*

F?tbol Follies: An Average April

Having lost twice now to Montelimar, Los Galácticos were prime for some revenge.

photo by alan smith (sucia)

Lucky for them, their opponent was hosting a weekend of activities in early April, but unfortunately Mastatal was lined up against a couple of veteran squads from Gamalotillo and surrounding lowland towns. Though they didn't get the rematch they wanted, *los amarillos* still came out firing on the short field, with ALEX connecting on two goals and NICOLE adding a beautiful third, crafting a ridiculous angle into the side netting and eliciting an uproar from the Mastatal crowd. Victory was short-lived however, the yellowshirts being quickly beckoned back on the field for a second match not five minutes after the first ended. GRANDULÓN played strong in net, with a couple brilliant saves on some twisting rockets, but could not do much against a canon of a penalty kick late in the first half. He nearly redeemed himself, however, with a full-field throw that ended up in the hands of the other keeper. Mastatal tired out in the end, falling 1-0 to even out the day. Fútbol was followed by dinner, carnivalesque gambling, "danceable" karaoke and a much-anticipated rodeo in Montelimar's fabled bullring. Good times had by all, flowing right on into Roger Day.

As for the Galácticos, the rest of April was a pretty tame month for fútbol. A few friendlies here and there (victory in San Vicente, draw in Guarumal) were the only action for Mastatal, who also had to say goodbye to star rookie keeper GRANDULÓN. With hands the likes of which had never before been seen in all of Pursical county, Geoff brought a commanding and unique presence to the field, coupled with a competitive desire and an effective skillset. His overhand throws from the box flew like arrows through the air, consistently able to strike any yellowshirt on the field with a quick precision. All that plus the intimidation factor and the Galácticos had themselves a secret weapon in the gentle giant. He will be sorely missed, for reasons that stretch beyond the net, but his mark will forever be left on a particularly memorable season for Mastatal. Surely the orange keeper jersey will be awaiting his return next year. And though the highs experienced in February have since subsided, and Mayday has essentially marked full entry into the rainy season, fútbol is still very much alive in the community. Soon enough, the Galácticos will be looking to the Champions League semifinalists for inspiration in their bid at the annual *campeanato* in La Gloria. Stay tuned for May, folly fans.

Inspirational Impressions: If You Want To See Rojo

This is a poem written by Marianne Monson, a children's' book author and recent Ranch guest who worked in the elementary school helping the kids write poems. Thanks Marianne.

If you want to see rojo:
taste the juicy fresas,
Listen to el gallo crow
Scoop up la tierra de Mastatal,
And lie in a hammock next to
the bougainvillea flores.
That is what you can do,

if you want to see rojo.

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew