

Rancho Mastatal Updates

June 2009

Rancho Mastatal UPDATE for the months of MAY/JUNE 2009

With well over thirty inches of precipitation in May, the entire annual load of Seattle, Mastatal has without a doubt entered the rainy season. The four-inch days harken back to last May, when washouts threatened to strand us from town for the birth of SOLEDAD, and so far the bus has been stuck at least once. Some loathe these types of inconveniences, while others bask in the sheer marvel of nature, yet no one can deny the new life given to the plant life by the falling water. As we celebrate a refreshed rainforest, we hunker down inside, break out the umbrellas, shed the shoes and accept our tropical fate. In the words of the great DON MARIO, "*Agua es vida,*" and we must never forget it. Of course, it's hard to ignore when it comes streaming off the gutters and blowing in the front porch, but we adapt and do our best to stay afloat, recognizing the immense power coming down before us. This year's rainy start has also been accompanied by a unique number of thunderstorms, many passing so close it can seem like they're inside the house. Indeed, it's been a crazy year for weather everywhere, particularly along the coast, where lightning moving over the Pacific can be seen from Mastatal on any given night. More so than usual, lightning is affecting our world, being felt on the grounds on at least one occasion so far. Recently, we also received very sad news that our dear friend WILLIAM, our clay provider and sawyer from Salitrales, was struck while in the field, placing him in a coma. For this to happen to one of the strongest men I've ever met truly puts things in perspective, not to mention humbles me even further to the power of the natural world. Our thoughts and prayers are with William and his family as we all hope for his recovery.



Sole up and walking, June 2009

photo by Tim O'Hara

Though the rains are here to stay for a while, the work does not cease; at times it even seems to intensify with the weather. Big moves are happening at the Ranch, while development in the community continues at a steady pace. Only time will tell how long the new roads can last in the face of Mother Nature.

Our summer internship is fully underway with the new group settling in and getting accustomed to their new lives in Mastatal. We've assembled what seems to be another stellar crew of builders,

gardeners, chefs, students, conservationists, leaders and learners. Without further ado, let's find out what we've been doing since we last checked in. Enjoy!

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RM Program News: The Human Biodigester Begins

Years in the making, ground has finally been broken on the Ranch's human biodigester down by the main house composting toilet. It all happened very suddenly, after TIMO ran into our good friend and coffee producer JOSE LUIS in Puriscal. Having built one on his own farm, and currently experiencing a lull in volunteers at his farm, Jose Luis was excited about coming out to the Ranch to head up the project. So it was that in the final weeks of May, amid all the last minute scrambling at the Cork and elsewhere, the spade hit the clay on something that's been no more than discussed casually for the past few years. All of a sudden, with the help of Timo and DON MARIO – who, incidentally, realized after half an hour he knew Jose Luis thirty years ago when the latter lived in Mastatal – a perfectly symmetrical cylindrical pit was dug in two days time. Subsequently, the bricked dome structure began to take shape, Jose Luis and helpers working relentlessly through the rains (with a temporary roof) to make as much headway as possible. At the time of writing, the dome was nearly complete, and though much work still remains, the ball is indisputably rolling in the right direction. We owe a tremendous amount of gratitude to the dedication, hard work and genuine spirit of the 63 year-old Jose Luis, who graciously commented, had Tim and Robin been here thirty years ago, he never would have left Mastatal. We applaud his ingenuity and perseverance, and will continue to drink his coffee with reckless abandon in joyful anticipation of powering the kitchen with our own poop. But wait we must - look for the methane biodigester to come online in a few months. A small group of new interns will be working on designing and building the shit house from where the biodigester will be filled. We're so damn excited to get this new project online.



Idyllic rivers

Conservation Report: An Investigative Look Behind ICE's *Corredor Tecnológico*

One Thursday in April, Timo received an invitation out of the blue from ICE, the electric and telecommunications giant, for a general assembly in the *salon comunál* that upcoming Saturday to discuss the biological corridor. The first thought that came to mind was, "what the heck does ICE have to do with the biological corridor?" Indeed, the short-notice invitation was a bit vague, enticing some of us to investigate further and discover how the biggest monopoly in Costa Rica was related to the passing of the scarlet macaws through Mastatal.

As we approached the community center, the pickup trucks were lining the street, including several shiny and new white ones with that familiar ICE logo on the side. I stopped Juan Luis and asked whether anyone could attend this gathering, and he assured me we could. Upon entering, however, I struggled to find more than a handful of Mastatal residents in the crowd. I didn't recognize many people at all, in fact,

and certainly didn't realize that guy I had waved to outside was the mayor of Puriscal. Inside, there was a big screen set up with a projector, music on the stereo and a video camera filming from the back. We were almost immediately approached by a gringo in a white button down and slacks with an agenda under his arm, "I thought I heard someone speaking English over here." Hold on, what? Did we just enter some kind of time warped U.S. corporate business meeting? Oh, no, that's just Brian McLean, the proprietor of Altos de Antigua in La Palma, a new development on the road to Puriscal. Oh boy, I thought, this is going to be weird.

As it turned out, the meeting was called to announce the initiation of ICE's technological corridor project in the area. In other words, funding had been approved to finally activate the cell phone tower constructed in December, and all the other efforts in this region, such as the virtual tour cameras in the park (unbeknown to most of us), were now online. The lack of locals in the crowd was due to the special invite-status of the meeting. In addition to Brian McLean, speaking through a translator about how much the Internet has benefited his operation, there were a number of other business owners from the region who formed part of an exclusive group known as Nazereno. Though the rest of us didn't quite know what this group was about, the leaders of this ICE project were certainly delighted to have them in attendance. There was even a representative of a 4WD Tour company present, who seized the opportunity to advertise his business with a big banner depicting SUVs driving through a river. What?

Apparently, ICE was using the already established biological corridor, a project to unite flora and fauna habitat throughout the Americas, to expand its technological prowess through Internet and cell phone service. This way, people could watch the animals in La Cangreja National Park from

the comfort of their home computers. Moreover, they were establishing relationships with public and private enterprises for the benefit of... what, exactly? Sure, MINAE was present at the meeting, but offered little more than a draining PowerPoint presentation on the breakdown of its jurisdiction in the region. In fact, when posed a direct question from Timoteo about why MINAE's presence, with particular regard to poaching, had dissipated in recent months since moving its headquarters to Santa Rosa, the one uniformed officer at the meeting refused to answer. Instead, there was some response from the aforementioned PowerPoint presenter about how they didn't have a working vehicle to patrol the area. ICE, on the other hand, has no lack of vehicles in the area, including the brand new Hilux that brought the corridor project's manager to this meeting. Indeed, this whole event was little more than a forum to pay homage to Don Carlos, the man behind it all, for all his wonderful work, and how we would all be sad to see him go. "Don't worry, friends, I've fallen in love with this area and somehow, someday, I'll make it back and buy a piece of land here." Even the mayor sang his praises, in a mini speech to the crowd where he encouraged everyone to pay their taxes so we could keep these roads in such good condition. He also made a point of recognizing the wonderful relationships being established with the Brian McLean's of the area, "When I see foreigners, I see money." Thanks, friend.

It was all a little much for me, and seeing how the presenters deflected Timo's questions, including one to Don Carlos about the negative effects of microwaves emanating from the tower and boxes right outside the Ranch gates, I reached my limit and had to leave. Somehow I couldn't get over the fog being placed around the real issues here, the lack of local participation and the uncontested infiltration of corporate forces. Of course, to be honest, these thoughts are a bit biased, coming from someone who's seen where this kind of development leads, and though certainly not all technology is bad, I can't help but wonder to what extent the people of Mastatal will truly benefit from ICE's work. Sure, phone and Internet access is great, and locals seem to enjoy having it around. Even we at the Ranch have assimilated it into our daily lives, at least for business purposes. (That's not to say the ringing sound coming out of the office doesn't still tweak a nerve inside.) But will the attention brought to the area improve local livelihoods as much as it does Don Carlos'? Will MINAE take advantage of increased tourism to exhibit the protection it is assigned by law to provide?

Not more than a week following this meeting I was walking down the road from the main house to Jeanne's when I heard the rumblings of a caravan coming up behind me. As I turned to look, a dozen matching, brand new SUVs passed in succession, led by a pickup with a TV camera filming out the back. On the door of each vehicle was an emblem of that 4WD Tour company that had advertised that day in the salon. Though I haven't seen them again since, I can't help but worry about this kind of presence in the area. For me, Mastatal is unique in many ways, and I can only hope its natural heritage does not fall victim to capitalist predators.

Brujita

Building Report: Keeping it Tidy, Keeping it Fun

That's been the new mantra this May, the rains having forced us to tighten up operations on the building front. Yet with a new fleet of screens and awnings already in place around the Ranch, most work sites remain nearly fully operational in non-hurricane rains. Up the road at the Cork,

TYLER and ROJO have been taking after Geoff, piddlin' liftin' stones. The perimeter has been well secured with drains, gravel and several rock runs' worth of stones, and the path from the house to the shitter is complete. They also mimicked Geoff's work on a new gutter for the other bedroom, where AL has framed in his walls and gotten back into the wattlin' game. The roof is painted, final daubing is underway, and rainy season screens and roof extensions are in place. It's nice to have a clean site, not to mention see the Cork reach near livable conditions.

In the woodshop, furniture has made a comeback in the form of a ridiculously beautiful hardwood desk for the choza (TIMO), a wrought-iron headboard bed for the big man (CHRIS), and the main entrance door to the Cork (JORDAN). Whether veteran or first-time work, all three projects turned out wonderfully. Upon arrival of a new mattress, one bedroom at the Cork will be ready for its first tenant, while the other continues to move along, awaiting the next wave of daub-loving interns to carry out the walls.

Elsewhere around the Ranch, work continues steadily on the new bodega. The floors are finished and door nearly complete. The interior is also serving as the Ranch's first smear-limewash experiment, thanks to the work of NICOLE and CAROLYN. After two coats, the walls look beautiful, tempting us to forego the plaster phase on other buildings as well. Updates to come on how this new system stands up to the weather.

Meanwhile, in addition to their stonework, landscaping and daubing at the Cork, Red and Tyler made a new goal of tackling some fronts over at Deeder's Garden, where a cob wall started in December was in desperate need of completion. Just a few bricks was all it took to finish it off, but the skinny bearded boys didn't stop there. In order for the wall to be truly enjoyed, not to mention dry completely for the smear coat, they decided it needed a roof over its head. Nothing fancy, but enough to provide shelter and shade to both the wall and its inhabitants. The result left behind a new look in the garden and, they hoped, a revived hangout space for interns and others. The stone patio surrounding the wall was also completed, and plans were set in motion for chicken food production in the garden beds. Watching Don Mario plant 300 yucca plants in about half an hour around the garden, the boys felt good about this space, anticipating a major agricultural expansion in the years to come.

Intern/Guest Gossip: Rancho Mastatal Poem/Rap

Lying in the hammock, putting beers on my tab
Glancing out on the mountain that resembles a crab
Waving `hi' to Sole as she wobbles on by
Holding on to her mama so she won't slip and cry
Never has a bug tasted so good
If you haven't tried kefir you SHOULD
Enjoy the view from the toilet
Use some sawdust so you won't spoil it
You can seize the day and wattle and daub
Or bake some goodness in an oven of cob
Take a walk down to the waterfall
I'd rather spend the day there over any mall

If you are feeling lazy the library has the book
From fiction to travel or how to cook
The guitars are fun to listen or play
The sounds of their strings can be heard all day
Enjoy a game of ping-pong
Or sit on the table and write a song
Hear the conch ring in your ears
It's time for a meal with your peers
On bagel night, pile it on high
Drop some food as Pico comes by
On rainy days the pit is good for a one-on-one
You can chat for hours until the day is done
Circle time precedes each meal
Where we share thanks and how we feel
You'll be surprised how quickly you feel at home
With so many people you're never alone

Laura Quante

Community Facts/Stories: UW Focuses on Community

This year's students from the University of Washington have proven to be a truly dedicated group, whose efforts have not only benefited the well-being of the Ranch but also contributed to the betterment of the Mastatal community. Their list of independent projects includes three endeavors in town, two with the elementary school and one in a local family's home. At the *escuela*, JOHN and SORRAYA, with the dedicated help of JIMMY, a local carver and builder, drew up plans and constructed a play tower for the kids out of local teak and cedar. The structure will both double as a recreation area and an outdoor classroom, the latter being the source of much excitement for the schoolteacher. Meanwhile, DAVE, JACKIE and VERONICA put together a couple sets of small, portable soccer goals out of PVC pipe. These will be great both for recess in the schoolyard and on the pitch. Visions of small-sided games and even tournaments immediately come to mind. The other community building project was headed up by LAUREN and LACEY, who decided to build a cob oven for MARITZA and DIMO. Maritza has been excited about Ranch cooking techniques ever since she participated in the solar cooking contest two years ago. She has recently shadowed the Ranch baking team on baking day and is getting ready to fire up her own oven as soon as it's ready.

Meanwhile, the rest of the students have been busy in the forest and around the Ranch working on a number of other projects from ALI's study on the effects of eco-tourism in the area to ALLISON and KIM'S study on the affects of wood in the streams to LAURA's study on leaf litter and finally to HEATHER and Dave's study comparing tree girth in forest plots. They've all been doing fabulous work and we thank them for their incredible efforts. For the first time since 2003, Susan will not be bringing students to Mastatal in 2010. She will be on sabbatical as she tests the waters in other parts of the world. She has been the Ranch's greatest ambassador and most outspoken critic and has worked tirelessly to improve the lives of so many in our community while trying to keep us honest. She's done great work and worked greatly. Her labors have upgraded the lives of so

many *Mastataleños* and enabled the Ranch to exist. She was there for us in the beginning as we struggled to survive as a business and continues to be the most important contributor to the Ranch and community. We will all greatly miss you and are forever indebted for your work here. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Comida Corner: Carrot Cardamom Cupcake

(Adapted from Moosewood Cookbook)

Yields 12 to 16 servings

1½ cups (3 sticks) butter or oil
1¾ cups brown sugar (*tapa dulce*)
2 eggs
1 banana, pureed (** you can vary this, replacing one small banana for every 2 eggs)
3 tsp vanilla extract
1 tsp grated lemon rind
4 cups flour
1 tsp salt
½ tsp baking soda
1 Tbs baking powder
1 tsp cardamom
2 tsp cinnamon
2½ cups carrot, finely shredded
¼ cup lemon juice (combined with carrot)
¾ cup raisins

1. Preheat oven to 350oF. Grease muffin pans.
2. Beat butter or oil and sugar in a large bowl. Add eggs and pureed bananas one at a time, beating well after each. When mixture is fluffy, stir in vanilla and lemon rind.
3. Sift together dry ingredients. Add wet mixture alternately with the carrot and lemon juice, beginning and ending with the dry. Mix just enough after each addition to combine – don't over-mix. Stir in raisins.
4. Spoon batter into muffin pans and bake for about 30 minutes.

F?tbol Follies: "We're in the minor leagues now, boy"

For some, it had been weeks since their last appearance on the pitch. Then, with a week to go before the annual La Gloria tournament, Los Galacticos had a round robin date in Los Angeles. With the women, children and Al following in the grey truck, players piled into the red, some looking fresh, others haggard, most in-between, and caravanned it out to L.A. and Bar Aqui Me Quedo. The kids immediately jumped out and started examining fallen mangoes. The search was on all day. We arrived to the plaza to see a short-sided pick-up game and what looked like hundreds of people gathered around the field and food court. As expected, there were three *equipos femininos*, including one of the same from the Montelimar games. Later that day, KATTIA and ROXANA jumped in with "Hatchet" and the other big barefoot ladies and put a hurtin' on the girls from Quepos. After the standard wait around it was getting close to time for the Galacticos to hit the field, but no one knew when and against whom. As a newly uniformed Montelimar struggled to equalize against Playa Bandera, four more teams got ready on the sidelines, including Mastatal and

Guarumal. Once the whistle blew all four were on the field ready for action. But the MC wouldn't budge on us playing second, against our neighbor we play all the time. The Guarumal squad, equally upset, packed up and headed home, agreeing with Mastatal to play each other on their home pitch instead of waiting. As the Galácticos got back in the red truck, word came that a deal had been negotiated. There was one more team up there willing to play, a group from Cristo Rey that like to call themselves "Los Hermanos". If we waited for the other game to end, and allowed one more women's game during our halftime, we could play next. Stay or go? Stay or go? A quick consensus to stay was reached, a decision that would lead to yet more waiting, witnessing a four-cop beer bust, entertaining people watching, including one cowboy in love with his horse, at least his hind leg, exclaiming to his cowboy boot key chain-toting buddies, "They're not smart, they just understand." Good-looking horse, too.

When it finally came time for Mastatal to play, they quickly put up three goals in the 30-minute first half, one each from JUNIOR, ALEX and CHRISTIAN. Following the 40-minute halftime women's game, los amarillos finished off the brothers with 2 more goals from Alex and JORGE for a 5-1 victory. Despite some shaky refereeing with red and yellow cracker wrappers for cards, Mastatal came away with a pretty solid outing on the heels of La Gloria the following weekend. On the ride home on top of the cab, gazing out over the landscape, I realized how much we really are in the minor leagues of Costa Rican futbol, and, frustrating and disorganized as it can be at times, how much I love it.

With the rains here to stay, the end of the summer season also means a small break in the fútbol action. Yet before letting the muscles relax completely, there is the annual tournament in La Gloria, the one for all the marbles – new uniforms. It's an all day event, with live music, worship and food and drink, a diocese-wide celebration in honor of the patron saint. Upon the Galácticos' arrival, the first round of games had just begun, and by the end of the second match there were upwards of eight teams registered for play. By early afternoon, there were thirteen squads, five of which wore yellow uniforms. Anticipating mass confusion on the pitch, the last team to show up, the local evangelical outfit, fittingly sported neon green jerseys, thoroughly blinding the competition with their brightness. Not to be distracted, Mastatal took the field for their first matchup against one of La Gloria's other host teams.

Part of the minor league game `round these parts is the opening kickoff blaster shot from half-field. Seemingly a waste of possession, this approach sees a lower success rate than trying to get Pico to eat cabbage. In all my years I have only seen one player demonstrate the power and precision to pull it off, and fortunately for the Galácticos, that player wears the gold and black and goes by the name of JUNIOR. Thus, before even moving their feet after the opening whistle, *los amarillos* were up one nil, Junior's strike sailing over the keeper's head and into the back of the net. Some would argue as to the legality of such a goal, having only touched one player, though at the time Mastatal was not about to object. In fact, they didn't do much else other than dominate the 15-minute first half. Junior added a second goal with his patented "behind the leg chipper ball," another one of his tricks that, when it actually works, leaves the competition wondering what just happened. A third from CHRISTIAN on the left wing put the halftime score at three-nil, and the second half proved just as confident for the Galácticos, who added a fourth and final goal off a beautiful ROJO header on a cross from ALEX. Thus, after a quick thirty minutes, Mastatal had themselves a 4-0 victory,

the highest scoring game of the first round, which would eventually, five hours later, send them directly into the semifinals.

The La Gloria tournament is known for many things, anticlimactic finales being one of them. As we sat and waited by the sideline for hours, I couldn't help but remember this day three years ago, when the Galácticos reached the finals but remained scoreless at the end of regulation, yet neither team could prevail in penalty kicks, despite going through all 10 players. The winner was thus decided on a coin toss in the rain, favoring the opponent. Sure enough, this year proved equally frustrating. As soon as they stepped on the field against Gamalotillo, the skies opened up and brought a hellstorm of thunder, lightning and torrential rains. With visibility reaching little beyond the rain drops dripping off their eyelids, and rays of lightning seemingly directly overhead, players had little opportunity to score, let alone strike the ball solidly. By the second half, the pitch was a swimming pool, leaving everyone ankle deep in water during quite possibly the strongest thunderstorm of the season to date. Soon enough it was just not safe anymore, nor feasible to even kick the ball more than 3 feet, and with the ref's final whistle everyone ran for cover. As expected, that match and the rest of the tournament were decided by the old coin flip, resulting in Gamalotillo winning the new uniforms on pure chance. By that point, the tournament was a wash, literally, and Mastatal was simply concerned with getting home safe and sound before it could get any worse.

A not-so-fitting end to a miraculous run by Los Galácticos, who enjoyed one of their most exciting and prosperous seasons to date. No one will ever forget that night in San Antonio under the lights, and though Sucia never got to see that exhibition match against Puntarenas sponsored by Imperial Silver, we will all look back on summer 2009 as a special one for the black and gold.

Brujita

Inspirational Impressions: Hope for the Flowers

"Hope, hope, hope for the flowers
Transform, embrace and realize your powers
El bosque le necesita para vivir."

-Chorus from Ranch-written tune based on Trina Paulus' hit book, *Hope for the Flowers*

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew