

Rancho Mastatal Updates

September and October 2009

This newsletter's being sent from the comforts of Timo's Mom's house in Upstate NY where we come each fall to enjoy the breathtaking colors, amazing friends and beautiful family. I must admit that this break came at the most perfect time possible. This year has been one of our busiest to date and as a result, perhaps the most tiring. Add a one-year old to the mix and burnout begins looming its ugly head. We're thankful to be temporarily away from the daily rigors of the Ranch, as incredible as they can be on a day-in, day-out basis. Please accept our apologies for the less frequent newsletters as of late. Ranch and community responsibilities, family, Solé and plans for Rancho Norte currently find us with our plates overflowing. We recently returned from yet another inspirational Bioneers by the Bay Conference organized by DESA and the Marion Institute. We'd like to send her and her amazing staff kudos for such an incredible time. We leave there blown away and invigorated each year. This year's Ranch-related attendees included SUCIA, TYLER, GEOFF, DAVID CRITTON, SOUPY, CAROLYN, NICOLE ESCLAMADO, NATE, SPARKY, ROBIN, SOLE, TIMO, RED, CAREY, NIC, ERIN CAVE, JEN SNYDER, LORI, KAREN MASTERSON, LARISSA, GREG, KERI, MATTHEW and others that I'm sure I missed. It was a mind-blowing turnout resulting in much frolicking, music, locally brewed beer, Frisbee and kitchen ball. We communally vowed that everyone attending next year would be obligated to arrive on the Wednesday before the start of the conference and leave the Wednesday after. It simply went much too fast for many of us. Nevertheless, we made the meaningful connection that we had hoped to. Post-Bioneers we were able to hook up with Ranch friends MICHAEL MUNN and STEPHEN and PHOEBE and their beautiful little daughter STELLA who all live in Amherst, SKIP and LIZABETH, and AARON WESTGATE. We're planning on hooking up with JON MINGLE and others in the coming weeks. It's been a stellar visit to date.

Before moving on to the content of this edition we'd like to send out a special thanks to ANGELA and her crew from HAWAII PACIFIC UNIVERSITY, for a such an amazing visit, and to BRENDA and TOM and their group from the UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON for the same. It's been a long overdue acknowledgement of their ongoing support and contribution to our work in Mastatal. And so, without further ado, enjoy the newsletter.

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RM Program News: Bioneers by the Bay 2009

In her keynote speech, discussing the systematic corporate pillaging of our planet, Vandana Shiva asked, "Did anyone ever ask the earth worm?" I was immediately stopped by the question and it took me to the line in Trina Paulus' book Hope for the Flowers, "Without butterflies the world would have few flowers." Later, these two visionaries, one a physicist, writer, farmer, activist; the other a Catholic guru, environmental activist and artist, met outside in the exhibition tent, and discussed the problems, and solutions.

Climbing Poetree performed. Alixa and Naima stood on opposite sides of the stage in meditative poses, bodies facing each other, eyes closed, as a short film played. The bottled water industry reaps billions in profits. The water that fills them is for the most equivalent to what comes out of most Americans' sink taps. The industry uses 8 times as much water as goes into the bottles they fill. The plastic bottles are made of oil. For oil we kill abroad. Billions of people in the world do not have access to clean water. Yet we, people, let the bottled water industry profit off of the earth's most precious resource. Plastic doesn't decompose. Why is this allowed?

At Bioneers, things become clear to me. Yes, often, like about the bottled water industry, these are things I already know. But I become educated with details and facts. The power of this conference for me is the coming together of what is obvious to many of us in clear, structured arguments, poems, performances and speeches. The power of having so many people with concrete solutions to the world's most pressing problems, in one place, meeting and discussing solutions, is extraordinary. And what becomes more obvious to me each year is that this doesn't need to be difficult. It really comes down to not doing things that don't make sense to begin with. Like producing, or buying, a bottle of water. This is a simple solution. How to stop the producers from producing; this might not be so simple. Where is the Ghandi of the environmental world? Is it Shiva? Paulus? Or is it all of us?

Paul Hawken said that we can create enough energy to stop using fossil fuels worldwide by building an infrastructure of 10,000 square miles of solar panels and wind turbines covering an area the size of Manhattan. Think if you will about the technological feat, human and environmental cost and undertaking of the current wars in the Middle East. Now picture Hawken's vision. Why is the former happening but not the latter?



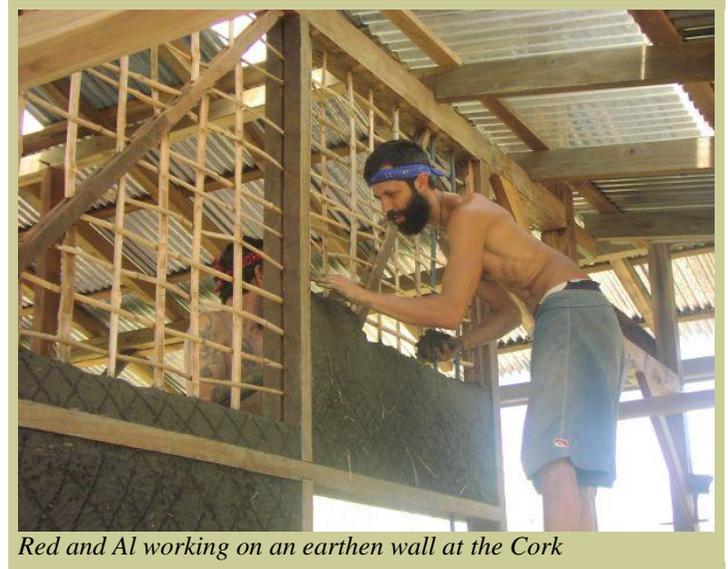
Naima the poet

Bioneers By The Bay. "Visionary and practical solutions for restoring the earth and its inhabitants". Once again, I feel lucky to have been there. And, once again, I am left asking myself, how do I do my part? The solutions are right in front of us.

Sucia

Building Report: What's in Store for 2010

Starting to look ahead to 2010, we're attempting to sort out the massive list of project possibilities for the upcoming year. Increased food production tops our list closely followed by continued infrastructure improvements, both at the Ranch and in the community of Mastatal, including an addition to the Choza for an ever growing Solé, a new bunkhouse to reduce the pressure on the oftentimes crowded Jeanne's House, a honing of the detail and finish work over at the Cork, and the construction of numerous new structures including a music studio, a goat stable, an art space, a toilet for our currently

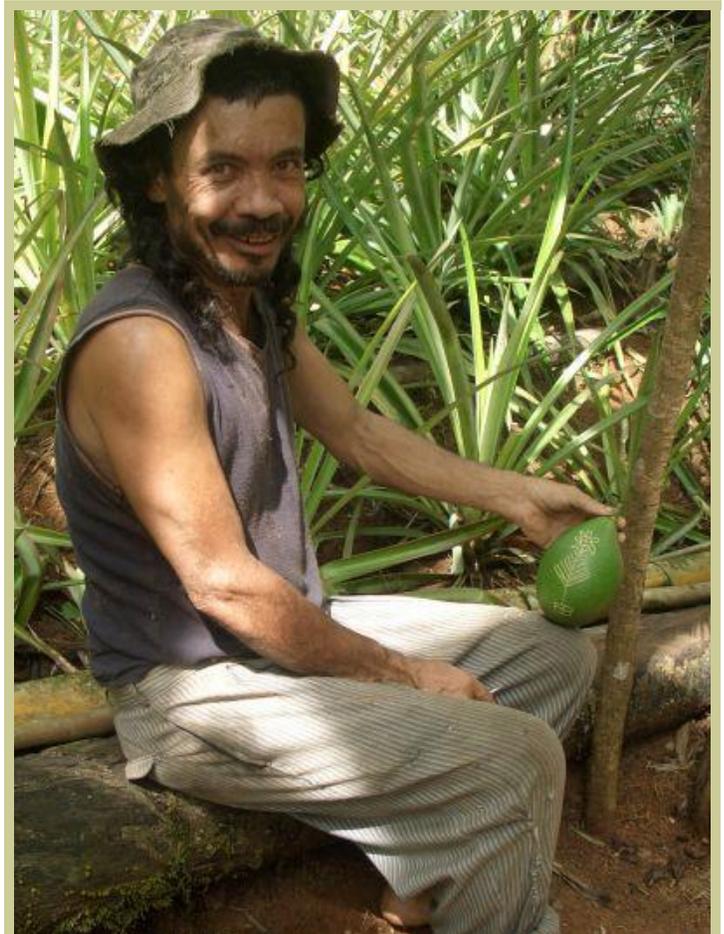


Red and Al working on an earthen wall at the Cork

rocking and rolling methane biodigester and most notably the Community Sharing and Learning Center (CLSC) in the middle town. We will obviously not get to everything on this list next year though we're hoping to tick off a few while we continue to host our annual workshops and educational groups and press on with our community and conservation work. We'll be looking forward to see many of you in Mastatal during the upcoming calendar year. And thanks to everyone for your extended support.

Conservation Update: Another Silent Spring
The last time we would ever have the pleasure of sitting in the company of Alcides would be at his family's house this past Spring as they celebrated a birthday. His family was eager to have us into their already cramped house, slices of cake ready to be served to anyone who visited. He was more clean-cut than usual and smiling, happy to be surrounded by his family. Tim did most of the talking for us, but our intimate little crew of viejitos (a term given to the gringos who have spent a lot of returning years in the area) managed to communicate with him in ways that words fail.

Before he was forced to seek shelter with his family in San Miguel, he lived on his own in a humble house on the same dirt road, but in the other direction from Mastatal. The man that owned the house decided one day that Alcides could no longer reside there. It was in that house that some of us got to know him. We helped install solar panels to bring him free electricity and built a rocket stove to replace his old set-up that darkened his walls and lungs with soot and ash. I hope it was not our influence that altered his living situation.



Alcides and his recently carved gourd

The man that we got to know was reserved, gentle, and kind with a timid humor that could make any grown man with a heart, wit and sense of humor laugh and cry simultaneously. He was one of the most humble persons I have ever met. Never will I forget the day that he flipped through the pages of a small sketchpad he had filled with original pencil drawings. They were magnificent in their simplicity. Every page summarized what many of us are attempting to live.

He passed away from pesticide poisoning. This is a serious problem that one would think should be curbed by now, almost fifty years after Rachel Carson tried to open our eyes. An estimated twenty-five million agricultural workers are struck with some form of pesticide poisoning each year in the developing world. Pesticides are sold worldwide, and often used by people who do not understand the real risks associated with their use. I am very saddened to say that a friend of ours has been added to that ever-growing list of victims started in Silent Spring. I hope that he finds his fallen friends wherever he is now: the birds, bees, and multitudes of flora and fauna that continue to disappear from our lands. I am contented to know that his final days in this place were with family.

I am happy to have known such a wonderful and humble man, as short as my friendship with him may have been. He taught me more in a short time than I could hope to inspire in anyone over the

course of a lifetime: live simply, love family, make your friends laugh, keep sketching beautiful ideas, and smile often. Thanks Alcides.

Sparky

Community Facts/Stories: Alex Visits the States!

I hitched a ride into the center of town to meet up with Alex and Greivin to grab a beer. Only, the beers weren't Imperiales but rather Mac n Jacks. And this wasn't Mastatal; it was downtown Seattle. Greivin has been living in Tacoma for a while now, married to Courtney (a Tacoma local) who, like myself, was grinning ear to ear as we sat down for dinner. Their choice of location: The Cheesecake Factory.



Alex in the snow in Wasington State

Alex obtained a visa to come to the States to study with Solar Energy International (SEI), hosted by Ian Woofenden and gang. The Mastate Charitable Foundation (MCF) helped front the money to cover his traveling expenses. During his month-long stay in the San Juan Islands (Guemes Island to be exact), he took four renewable energy classes. We hope that this experience will allow Alex to become the resident expert in Mastatal and the surrounding area on renewable energy systems. He already has an amazing skill set, and we're excited to see what the future holds. And to boot, most of you readers know the value of international travel and the profound effect that can have on perspective...

I could only think of a handful of places below The Cheesecake Factory on my list of possibilities for dinner and drinks, but Greivin seems to love it. And, when I take a step back, I can see why he would. It is not often that he travels into the city from Tacoma. It's nice inside, has good china, "safe" dinner choices, and singing wait-staff (if it's your birthday). And it provided a decent atmosphere for conversation.

Alex and Greivin re-told old stories and memories that they knew well, but they laughed out loud and often uncontrollably... like seeing an old high school or college buddy. For a first time listener, I was also on the verge of spitting up my Mac n Jack through my nose. As I told stories of their gringo friends here in the States, they did the same and often referred to us as "crazy gringos." Meanwhile, Courtney and I had cleared our plates, and Alex and Greivin left theirs virtually untouched. Too much heat and too much parsley, respectively. "Crazy ticos," I thought.

Sparky

Intern/Guest Gossip: Noche del Diablo

In single digit latitudes

I begin my chilling tale

*Where mighty fortress Mastatal
was built without a nail*

*The glow of moon shone softly
through my corrugated roof
When out in the gloomy distance
I heard some creature on the hoof*

*Perhaps the Chupacabra
of a beast with fang and hair
I thought fight then, "I'll make my stand
in this hoochie bamboo lair"*

*I heard an awful crashing noise
and pulled my covers tight
I held my breath with its every step
and hoped it wouldn't bite*

*It had one evil shiny eye
and walked with an awkward gait
I grit my teeth and clenched my fist
prepared to meet my fate*

*It stumbled on the rocky path
as it moved beneath my perch
and I swear I heard it growl and moan
as from side to side it lurched*

*Just then the moon broke through the clouds
and my fortune did I learn
"Aw, shit," I thought, "I feared for naught...
It's just a drunk intern."*

W. Rogers
2009



Dom's 21st b-day + custom-made apron + veggie sushi rolls = what?

photo by Aimee Gaines

Comida Corner: Honey Walnut Bread

For this recipe at the Ranch I use half honey, half tapa dulce as well as half butter and half oil but I am sure it will turn out even more delicious if you are able to follow the actual recipe. I also used raisins instead of walnuts but I am sure any dried fruit or nut would be delicious.

Makes 1 large loaf. Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

1-cup milk

1-cup honey

½ cup soft butter

2 eggs, beaten

1 ¼ cups white flour

1 ¼ cups whole-wheat flour

1-teaspoon salt

1-tablespoon baking powder

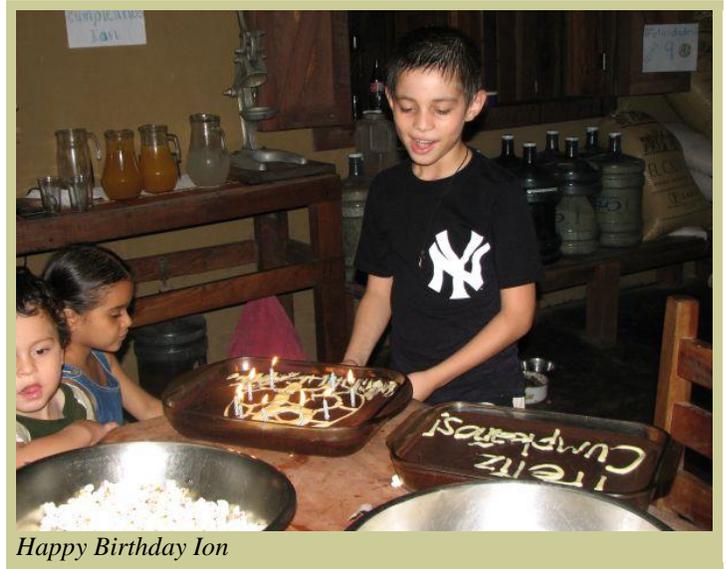
½ - ¾ cup chopped nuts or dried fruit

Combine the milk and honey, and stir over low heat until blended. Remove from the heat and beat in the butter, eggs, flour, salt, and baking powder. Mix until well blended then fold in the nuts. Place in greased loaf pan, and back for 1 hour at 325 degrees, or until a toothpick comes out clean. Cool for 15 minutes in the pan before removing and allow to cool longer before slicing.

Taken from the Tassajara

F?tbol Follies: Streak Continues

Since the publication of our last newsletter the non-losing streak has continued. Congrats to all of the players and fans of Los Galácticos. The team is currently taking a brief respite with washed out roads and incessant rains preventing transportation and the temporary absence of TIMO and ALEX. More to come soon.



Happy Birthday Ion

Inspirational Impressions

: Paul Hawken

The Commencement Address by Paul Hawken to the Class of 2009, University of Portland, May 3, 2009

When I was invited to give this speech, I was asked if I could give a simple short talk that was “direct, naked, taut, honest, passionate, lean, shivering, startling, and graceful.” No pressure there.

Let’s begin with the startling part. Class of 2009: you are going to have to figure out what it means to be a human being on earth at a time when every living system is declining, and the rate of decline is accelerating. Kind of a mind-boggling situation... but not one peer-reviewed paper published in the last thirty years can refute that statement. Basically, civilization needs a new operating system, you are the programmers, and we need it within a few decades.

This planet came with a set of instructions, but we seem to have misplaced them. Important rules like don’t poison the water, soil, or air, don’t let the earth get overcrowded, and don’t touch the thermostat have been broken. Buckminster Fuller said that spaceship earth was so ingeniously designed that no one has a clue that we are on one, flying through the universe at a million miles per hour, with no need for seatbelts, lots of room in coach, and really good food—but all that is changing.

There is invisible writing on the back of the diploma you will receive, and in case you didn’t bring lemon juice to decode it, I can tell you what it says: You are Brilliant, and the Earth is Hiring. The earth couldn’t afford to send recruiters or limos to your school. It sent you rain, sunsets, ripe cherries, night blooming jasmine, and that unbelievably cute person you are dating. Take the hint.

And here’s the deal: Forget that this task of planet-saving is not possible in the time required. Don’t be put off by people who know what is not possible. Do what needs to be done, and check to see if it was impossible only after you are done. When asked if I am pessimistic or optimistic about the future, my answer is always the same: If you look at the science about what is happening on earth and aren’t pessimistic, you don’t understand the data. But if you meet the people who are working to restore this earth and the lives of the poor, and you aren’t optimistic, you haven’t got a pulse. What I see everywhere in the world are ordinary people willing to confront despair, power, and incalculable odds in order to restore some semblance of grace, justice, and beauty to this world.

The poet Adrienne Rich wrote, “So much has been destroyed I have cast my lot with those who, age after age, perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world.” There could be no better description. Humanity is coalescing. It is reconstituting the world, and the action is taking



Beautiful drop

place in schoolrooms, farms, jungles, villages, campuses, companies, refuge camps, deserts, fisheries, and slums.

You join a multitude of caring people. No one knows how many groups and organizations are working on the most salient issues of our day: climate change, poverty, deforestation, peace, water, hunger, conservation, human rights, and more. This is the largest movement the world has ever seen. Rather than control, it seeks connection. Rather than dominance, it strives to disperse concentrations of power. Like Mercy Corps, it works behind the scenes and gets the job done. Large as it is, no one knows the true size of this movement. It provides hope, support, and meaning to billions of people in the world. Its clout resides in idea, not in force. It is made up of teachers, children, peasants, businesspeople, rappers, organic farmers, nuns, artists, government workers, fisherfolk, engineers, students, incorrigible writers, weeping Muslims, concerned mothers, poets, doctors without borders, grieving Christians, street musicians, the President of the United States of America, and as the writer David James Duncan would say, the Creator, the One who loves us all in such a huge way.

There is a rabbinical teaching that says if the world is ending and the Messiah arrives, first plant a tree, and then see if the story is true. Inspiration is not garnered from the litanies of what may befall us; it resides in humanity's willingness to restore, redress, reform, rebuild, recover, reimagine, and reconsider. "One day you finally knew what you had to do, and began, though the voices around you kept shouting their bad advice," is Mary Oliver's description of moving away from the profane toward a deep sense of connectedness to the living world.

Millions of people are working on behalf of strangers, even if the evening news is usually about the death of strangers. This kindness of strangers has religious, even mythic origins, and very specific eighteenth-century roots. Abolitionists were the first people to create a national and global movement to defend the rights of those they did not know. Until that time, no group had filed a grievance except on behalf of itself. The founders of this movement were largely unknown — Granville Clark, Thomas Clarkson, Josiah Wedgwood — and their goal was ridiculous on the face of it: at that time three out of four people in the world were enslaved. Enslaving each other was what human beings had done for ages. And the abolitionist movement was greeted with incredulity.

Conservative spokesmen ridiculed the abolitionists as liberals, progressives, do-gooders, meddlers, and activists. They were told they would ruin the economy and drive England into poverty. But for the first time in history a group of people organized themselves to help people they would never know, from whom they would never receive direct or indirect benefit. And today tens of millions of people do this every day. It is called the world of non-profits, civil society, schools, social entrepreneurship, nongovernmental organizations, and companies who place social and environmental justice at the top of their strategic goals. The scope and scale of this effort is unparalleled in history.

The living world is not "out there" somewhere, but in your heart. What do we know about life? In the words of biologist Janine Benyus, life creates the conditions that are conducive to life. I can think of no better motto for a future economy. We have tens of thousands of abandoned homes

without people and tens of thousands of abandoned people without homes. We have failed bankers advising failed regulators on how to save failed assets. We are the only species on the planet without full employment. Brilliant. We have an economy that tells us that it is cheaper to destroy earth in real time rather than renew, restore, and sustain it. You can print money to bail out a bank but you can't print life to bail out a planet. At present we are stealing the future, selling it in the present, and calling it gross domestic product. We can just as easily have an economy that is based on healing the future instead of stealing it. We can either create assets for the future or take the assets of the future. One is called restoration and the other exploitation. And whenever we exploit the earth we exploit people and cause untold suffering. Working for the earth is not a way to get rich, it is a way to be rich.

The first living cell came into being nearly 40 million centuries ago, and its direct descendants are in all of our bloodstreams. Literally you are breathing molecules this very second that were inhaled by Moses, Mother Teresa, and Bono. We are vastly interconnected. Our fates are inseparable. We are here because the dream of every cell is to become two cells. And dreams come true. In each of you are one quadrillion cells, 90 percent of which are not human cells. Your body is a community, and without those other microorganisms you would perish in hours. Each human cell has 400 billion molecules conducting millions of processes between trillions of atoms. The total cellular activity in one human body is staggering: one septillion actions at any one moment, a one with twenty-four zeros after it. In a millisecond, our body has undergone ten times more processes than there are stars in the universe, which is exactly what Charles Darwin foretold when he said science would discover that each living creature was a "little universe, formed of a host of self-propagating organisms, inconceivably minute and as numerous as the stars of heaven."

So I have two questions for you all: First, can you feel your body? Stop for a moment. Feel your body. One septillion activities going on simultaneously, and your body does this so well you are free to ignore it, and wonder instead when this speech will end. You can feel it. It is called life. This is who you are. Second question: who is in charge of your body? Who is managing those molecules? Hopefully, not a political party. Life is creating the conditions that are conducive to life inside you, just as in all of nature. Our innate nature is to create the conditions that are conducive to life. What I want you to imagine is that collectively, humanity is evincing a deep innate wisdom in coming together to heal the wounds and insults of the past.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once asked what we would do if the stars only came out once every thousand years. No one would sleep that night, of course. The world would create new religions overnight. We would be ecstatic, delirious, made rapturous by the glory of God. Instead, the stars come out every night and we watch television.

This extraordinary time when we are globally aware of each other and the multiple dangers that threaten civilization has never happened, not in a thousand years, not in ten thousand years. Each of us is as complex and beautiful as all the stars in the universe. We have done great things and we have gone way off course in terms of honoring creation. You are graduating to the most amazing, stupefying challenge ever bequested to any generation. The generations before you failed. They didn't stay up all night. They got distracted and lost sight of the fact that life is a miracle every moment of your existence. Nature beckons you to be on her side. You couldn't ask for a better

boss.

The most unrealistic person in the world is the cynic, not the dreamer. Hope only makes sense when it doesn't make sense to be hopeful. This is your century. Take it and run as if your life depends on it.

*- Paul Hawken is a renowned entrepreneur, visionary environmental activist, and author of many books, most recently *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming*. He was presented with an honorary doctorate of humane letters by University president Father Bill Beauchamp, C.S.C., in May, when he delivered this superb speech.*

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew