

Rancho Mastatal Updates

January 2008

Rancho Mastatal UPDATE for the month of
JANUARY 2008 *(illustrated with photos by Ana Cohen)*

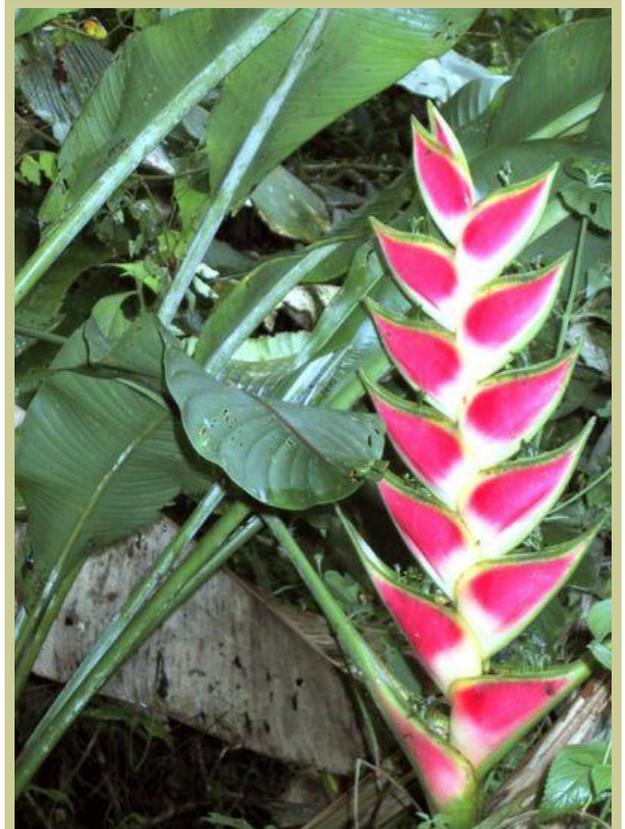
Our early-2008 activities have had us running at top speed after a festive and joyous holiday season. The annual Wilderness First Response Certification Course with Aerie School for Backcountry Medicine kicked off the New Year and Solar Energy International's (SEI) Renewable Energy in the Developing World course closed out an eventful January. The Aerie/SEI one-two punch has become a faithful tradition at the Ranch. We've been working with both of these magnificent organizations for over half a decade now. A bit more about this year's workshops below.

Now that the first month of the year is behind us, we look forward to yet another Ranch custom; our yearly trip to the Pacific Ocean to gorge ourselves on sun, fun and yes, the real motivation for the outing, the Super Bowl! We live without television for nearly all of the year, but on the first Sunday of

February we make an important exception and join the millions of other viewers across the globe to watch one of the United States' greatest contributions to mankind, American Football. This year's fixture matches up two of the most competitive organizations in sports history, the New York Football Giants and the New England Patriots. There's been a lot of jawing back and forth in the last weeks with the mostly Northeast crew split down the middle between Gents and Pats fans. Regardless of the result, we plan on enjoying our first *real* day off since the New Year.

This year's register of attendees includes such famous personalities as SPARKY, A SMITH, NIC, GRANDELON, DESA, RACHEL JACKSON, TIMO, ROBIN, GREG, DAVID CRITTON, RYAN BELTZ and new faces JENNIE, ANYA, JULIAN, LORI, FRANCESCA, GLEN, JESS and NUG. There's even been some talk about the possibility of one our idols making a guest appearance, so if you're reading this T-MAN, you better get on your horse and ride baby. We're in Esterillos Este. Yep, you read that one right. Change of venue this year. They're showing the game at the pizza joint. So, without further ado and to all of those Amani Toomer fans out there, Go Giants! We're immensely proud that you'll be representing in AZ this year. What a run. Enjoy.

This month's update includes:



A lobster-claw heliconia - Costa Rica's answer to the native wildflower.

photo by Ana Unruh Cohen

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RM Program News: Lights, Bio-digestors, Cookers and Wilderness Medicine

What do all of the above terms have in common? Anyone? No? Well, they were all part of Rancho Mastatal's packed January calendar. During Solar Energy International's recent workshop in our town, we installed our forth methane bio-digester at ENRIQUE and NANA's, put in our forth solar installation at BOLIVAR and ROSAMARIA's house, and built our third and forth permanent solar cookers, one that found it's way to MARITZA and JORGE's and the other to LILY. The latter will soon to be showcased in front of her new and Mastatal's first ever restaurant, Soda Paso de las Lapas.

Additionally, DAVE MCEVOY and his staff certified two more young Mastatal adults, GABI and JUNIOR, in the important training of Wilderness First Response (WFR). Both courses were an enormous success. We feel that we met our goals during both programs and have already set dates for 2009. We've even talked about the possibility of expanding the two programs and next year with Aerie we're striving to offer a Wilderness EMT course and a short course on wilderness medicine for medical doctors, in addition to our yearly WFR offering. Thanks to Dave, IAN, TONY, FERNANDO, JASON, BERTILA, FATIMA, JUAN CARLOS, CLAIRE and all the participants and others who helped make these classes an enormous pleasure to host.



*Photos from an SEI class in January 2006. Testing the solar panels before they go on the roof
photo by Ana Unruh Cohen*



Geoff playing with poo

Conservation Update: *Dung Shui*

The awesome power of poop is not a new concept here at the Ranch. There are now four composting toilets that allow our own droppings to decompose and transform into some of the richest and most beautiful dark brown soil you are likely to ever see. Many of Costa Rica's endangered tree species, which Junior grows in the nursery (using this soil), have given rave reviews of our dung. The local water supply also appreciates the fact that we are not often flushing gallons of water at a time and sending our stink-logs to places where they do not belong. Meanwhile, local cows continue to provide us with a

key ingredient to our wattle and daub walls. The Couple's Cabin's (a.k.a. Shag Shack or Silver Nugget) walls are shooting up at a ridiculous rate. The binding properties of cow pies in our mixes play a crucial role in making this possible.

Our hope is now to take another step forward in utilizing this beautiful thing that so many people unfairly dub "waste." Whenever the SEI workshop comes through, we cannot help but think about how great it would be to have a functional biodigester on our property. We have the materials, the know-how, and the space. Discussions have begun, and plans are beginning to come together. What this means for the future of gas power at the Ranch obviously remains to be seen, but it is very exciting. Imagine if we could someday cook our meals using only natural emissions from our "waste!" We could light the paths to our composting toilets, thus eradicating any need to use indoor flush toilets at night! The potential is limitless. Excrement? More like excellent!



Building Report: Tool Talk

Evening at the Workshop
photo by David Katz

Tool storage at the Ranch has been one of our many nemeses over the years. During the six years that we've resided in Mastatal, we've failed to develop a solid system to keep our building gear dry, safe and well organized. This might not be a big deal for the majority of households around the world, but given the amount of building that goes on around here, our present situation is pretty shameful. We've taken some small concrete steps in the last few weeks to change all of this. We've been thinking about a proper tool storage area for over a year now, but for many reasons, we haven't done anything tangible to rectify our reprehensible attention to tool detail until recently. JULIAN EPPS, a current intern, with the help of intern RYAN BELTZ and others, is putting pencil to paper in hopes of defining a design to work with in the coming weeks. Our goal is to break ground at some point before the end of February. The timber frame structure will include a proper tool sharpening station, cubbies for personal storage, a workbench or two, and enough room to appropriately house all of our current and future tools. The new shed, to be located in between our barn and workshop, will be much better situated, alleviating the daily dilemma of having to walk back to the main house every time you realize that you've forgotten a tool for your project. I'm as excited about this building project as any other that we've tackled over the years. I'm confident that this will improve our lives in positive ways that we can't totally comprehend right now. By having a dedicated and properly positioned space for our tools, we'll free up some desperately needed space at the main house for our kitchen pantry items. Little by little, we'll give Robin back her jewelry workshop space. This will even become more true once we finish the local crafts display case and store destined for the new library space. Lots of improvements and changes in the building department, as usual.

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Pato Pablo

Curious and hobbit like
In his solitary ways

Quietly grazing up from the forest floor
Bathing and preening in the shiny stream of grey

Trying hard to stay camouflaged
But too nervous to succeed

His evolution a mystery
the rainforest duck his unlikely breed

Community Facts/Stories: New Additions to the Mastatal Community

Our community greeted us with open arms upon our recent arrival back from the States. It's always special to come back home and see so many smiling faces; the kids especially bring a big grin to my face. Every year that we see folks for the first time after two months in the US we return to the same responses. "Wow, you are really pale, there must not be any sun in the United States" and the customary, "Look how fat you guys have gotten!" This year was no exception apart from having a good response for the latter comment for once, which I excitedly told them. This was generally followed by a pause, a look downward, and then a congratulatory hug. After telling only a few people that Tim and I were expecting a baby, the whole town of course knew. Now five months pregnant I definitely look like I ate *way* too much over vacation and there is no doubt in anyone's mind that I am packing. Every time I leave the Ranch, I am met with smiling faces and belly rubs and comments on how beautiful a pregnant woman's belly is! Makes me feel better about the four kilos I gained last month!



There must be something in the water as there are four of us in town expecting right now. LAURA is three months along and just beginning to show, her sister ANDREA is also three months, and CAROL is right there as well. Looks like we will have a population boom this year in our small community! The elementary school teacher is overjoyed that his class numbers will finally grow in a few years.

We would also like to take this opportunity to welcome to the greater Ranch community our newest member, a little black and white kitten that we named BANDIDO. His name definitely fits his personality. He arrived one busy morning when we had three people cranking out pancakes, PICO looking on attentively waiting for his share, and CU and MAXIMO gobbling up their early morning kibble. During this normal morning commotion, in strolls Bandido like he owns the place, not afraid of anything. He proceeded to jump up onto Cu and Maximo's food throne and sent them hissing and flying away as if he had the plague. He's been here ever since and has made an incredibly easy transition. New pets generally have to prove their worth over a period of weeks, but Bandido's irresistible cuteness got him through on the fast track. Over the weeks he's put on a few much-needed pounds and his fur has gained a nice sheen. Everyone (even Cu) has welcomed him into our family. And the family grows....

Comida Corner: Pineapple and Sprouted Amaranth Vegan Muffins

RACHEL made these goodies some weeks back. They were gobbled up before our eyes. They are moist, crunchy and oh so good!

Makes 12 muffins

Ingredients:

1 ¼ cup oil

1 ¼ cup tapa dulce (or maple syrup)

4 cups whole-wheat flour
2 small bananas, pureed
1 tsp orange rind and juice of 1 orange
3 tsp salt
1 Tbs baking powder
1 tsp allspice
2 tsp cinnamon
½ of a medium pineapple, diced (any fruit can be substituted, peaches, pears, apples, etc.)
3 Tbs grated ginger
1 cup sprouted amaranth

Steps:

1. Grease muffin tin.
2. Mix oil, tapa dulce, pureed bananas, vanilla ginger, orange rind and juice, and sprouted amaranth.
3. Mix together dry ingredients and add to liquid mixture – DON'T OVERMIX. Add pineapple.
4. Divide batter evenly in the muffin tin.
5. Bake at 350 degrees F for 20-25 minutes.

Buen provecho.



Locals from Mastatal look on at another Galacticos performance

photo by Ana Unruh Cohen

F?tbol Follies: Embarrassment

We've reached a new low point in the history of *Los Galácticos de Mastatal*. Unprecedented results and events characterized two recent games that brought shame and embarrassment to our once burgeoning fútbol program. I must admit that I'm happy to report the following not from a first hand account, but rather from stories passed on to me by players and community members.

A few Sundays back, due to the fact that I was taking the Wilderness First Response Certification course, I was unable to attend our game in La Vasconia against a team called Sardinal. When walking down the street later that day, I ran into Marcos and asked him how the game went. He looked at me with surprise and said, "You didn't hear?" Itold him that I hadn't. He then proceeded to tell me that the final score was 15-0. I consider myself a fluent Spanish speaker but in this case I questioned whether I had fully mastered my numbers. I responded with a "what?" Marcos then assured me that I had heard him correctly. He continued to tell me that many of the team members were drunk for the 10:00 a.m. start and that they got absolutely clobbered under the hot lowland sun. To add insult to injury, two Sundays later, another humiliating story started making its way through town and Los Amarillos most recent defeat had the team looking for a new direction. In the middle of the second half against a team named Los Mecánicos de Parrita, with the game still close, CARACA ran off the field during play from his goalkeeper's position to purchase and slaman ice cold Imperial before running back to his defend his goal. The team went on to lose by three goals and his teammates were up in arms over his antics. Many have sworn never to play with him again.

So, where to go from here. I guess only up, which is the upside ofthis otherwise sad story about recent events in Mastatal fútbol. Good luck to Arsenal and Liverpool in the their upcoming ChampionsLeague games against Italian powerhouses AC Milan and Inter Milan. See you out on the pitch.

Inspirational Impressions: East of Eden

"When our food and clothing and housing all are born in the complication of mass production, mass method is bound to get into our thinking and to eliminate all other thinking"

-East of Eden- John Steinbeck -1952

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew



Natural building is definitely hands-on
photo by Robin Nunes