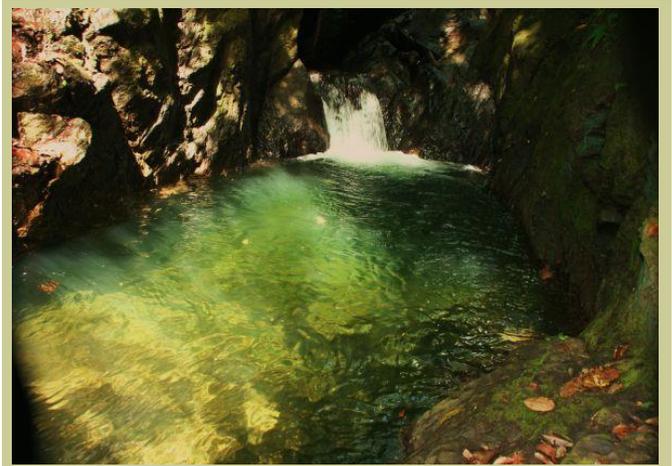


Rancho Mastatal Updates

March 2008

Rancho Mastatal UPDATE for the month of MARCH 2008

As we begin to wrap up our winter internship and prepare for the departure of many friends for the remainder of the year, our thoughts turn to rainy afternoons, inside projects, SUSAN and her crew from UW, and our soon-to-arrive summer interns. We're rushing to get roofs on all of our new buildings before the rains become too consistent. We built a new shower structure, cabin and toolshed this dry season, all timberframe structures, and all ready for a wet season of cobbing, wattle and daubing and other interior work.



The sweet little swimming hole just a short hike down the path from ranch house

photo by Mark

Our winter intern program was packed with incomprehensibly talented individuals. Our level of productivity was through the roof though we never forgot our roots, grown deep at the horseshoe pit, Ultimate field and basketball court. The popularity of our intern program has grown leaps and bounds over the past few years as applications pile up in my inbox. We've had a record number apply for this summer and have already received numerous submissions for the winter of 2009. The new intern format has been working out super well for us and has increased our output and efficiency while at the same time reducing general stress levels around the Ranch.

Robin's moved into her eighth month as everyone predicts the Nug's sex. Any name suggestions, especially for males, are greatly welcomed. Everything in town is going well. The pulpería has miraculously kept its music levels low as of late and has been closing at a reasonable hour most nights as Chepo and Lily's new soda has become the new hotspot in town. And yes, the rainy season has arrived. We're thankful for the breathtaking return of so many hues of green. It's also nice not to have to water the garden anymore. And of course, the cooler temps are welcomed by most. Enjoy the works of love and imagination that follow.

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Conservation Report: *Concurso de Ensayos*

Every year for the past four years MCF has sponsored an environmental essay contest open to the residents of Mastatal, San Miguel, La Fila de Aguacate and Zapatón. The winners earn a trip with SUSAN BOLTON and her undergraduate students from the University of Washington to one or more beautiful destinations in Costa Rica. Past victors have swum off the coast of the Nicoya Peninsula; spent a night in Hacienda Barú's rainforest outside of Dominical; visited the stunning flora and fauna of Palo Verde National Park, and much more.



The winners of the MCF Annual Essay Contest from 2007

The topic of this year's competition is "a vision of our communities in the intermediate future". Entrants will write about how they envision our region ten years into the future and what they will do to ensure that it turns out as they have imagined. The first trip will take two lucky students from the local *telesecundaria* to walk amongst the thermal features and volcanoes found in Rincón de la Vieja National Park and to snorkel off the coast of Isla Murcielago on the northwest Pacific Coast. Our motive in organizing this annual event is to expose locals to parts of their beautiful country that they would otherwise never have the opportunity to see. Trip expenses are covered entirely by the [Mastate Charitable Foundation](#). Winners have the opportunity to learn about conservation and another culture, practice their English, and potentially experience something that will positively alter the way they think and act in the future. Upon returning to their communities the travelers are obligated to share their experiences with their family and friends via a small community meeting.

Costa Rica is renowned for its conservation practices. The reality for those of us that live here is widespread deforestation, poaching and uncontrolled development. We're trying to do our part with a variety of activities to assure that Costa Rica's reputation as a world environmental leader is accurate, and hope that offering these trips is a step in the right direction. Thanks to all that make this a reality for these kids through their generous donations to MCF!



Starboard Cork, the Ranch's newest timberframe structure, under construction

Building Report: Popping the Cork

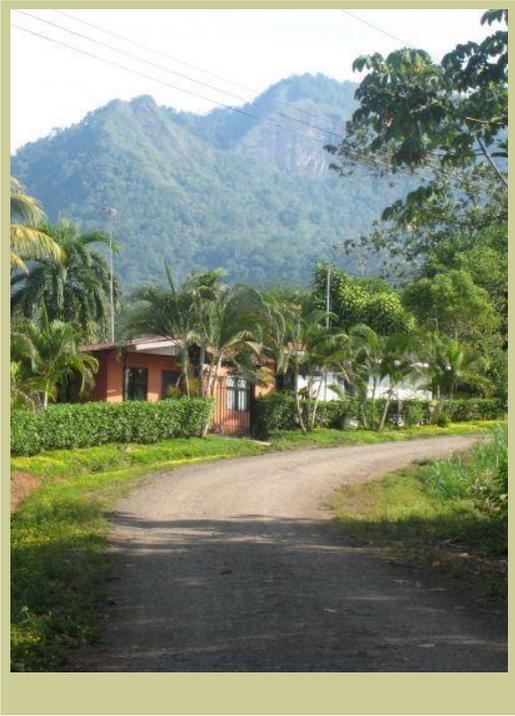
This past March, in what may be considered a Herculean effort, the Ranch raised its second ever timber frame structure on a mango-studded site overlooking the mothership of Mastatal, La Cangreja. The view from "Starboard Cork," or the Cork, as it may become to be known, rivals that of the Elmer Hohl in the power and grace of the forested slopes that represent the heralded future of this place. It was in this spirit that veteran volunteers SUCIA and GRANDULON created the vision for the Cork, inspired by the beauty and simplicity of the couples cabin yet executed on a slightly grander scale but with just as much fervor as last year's

endeavor. Indeed, the energy expended on the construction of the Cork, from the first strike of the pick-axe to the pounding of the final peg, was maintained at the highest level of enthusiasm, due in large part to the passion shared by all those involved.

The deck and frame, a veritable mezcla of local teak, laurel and *pilon*, proves to be one of the most solid and well-constructed structures on the Ranch to date, thanks to a beefeater concrete foundation engineered by thriving philosopher-mason Geoff Kinder, as well as the introduction of "square" milled timbers, compared to last year's round teak haul-and-hew. After a month and a half of prep work, the Cork's creators were joined by an exceptional cast for a week-long workshop led by returning superheroes SKIP and LIZABETH. It was the largest frame they had ever built in a single week, and with twelve incredibly dedicated pupils and some tweaking here and there, they made it happen with grace. Although a few rafters were left to be cut and raised following their departure, the effort made throughout that last week of March was a force to be reckoned with, perhaps previously unseen in a single week at the Ranch.

Thus, with the initial stages of the Cork well underway, the future looms large for el Barrio. I feel fortunate to witness its place in history being commemorated one day during construction by the passing of four scarlet macaws directly overhead. Oh boy. Stay tuned for more from the mango tree.

La Bruja



Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Change

Five years ago I arrived at Rancho Mastatal for the first time on the afternoon bus. The road was quiet. Three or four locals exited the bus along with me. A few patrons sat at a quiet *pulpería*. A skinny dog, lazily lounged in the middle of the dusty road. To the best of my recollection, there was much less of a people buzz around the center of this remote, mountain, farming town.

The passage of time has brought change to Mastatal. La Cangreja National Park has seen a relatively small, but very real, increase in tourist activity. Partially because of the Ranch, and *La Iguana Chocolate*, the local economy, in the traditional sense, has grown stronger. In March, Lily, Chepo and family opened the first ever soda in Mastatal. *El Paso de Las Lapas* is a quaint family restaurant serving *tipico* style meals, across the road from the Ranch and behind the bus stop. Also, a second *pulpería* opened up the road, a few houses from the *fútbol*field. Now there are

two *pulperias* that sell packaged food products, like ice cream, beverages in plastic bottles, and sugary snacks, along with kitchen needs like flour and eggs. With packaged foods comes the need to dispose of the waste that comes with it. This often means the toxic smell of burning plastic, as locals do what they have to do to get rid of their garbage.

With all the extra business and activity, more people come through Mastatal. And more people in town have steady paying jobs. As a result, people have opportunities and choices that they might not have had in the past. For example, starting at around 5:30 a.m. every morning, the roar of motor-bike engines can be heard buzzing past the Ranch. People are going to work, dropping relatives off at the bus stop, or maybe heading into Puriscal for the day. Cars and trucks pass through more regularly than ever before. More local jobs provide local residents the chance to buy cars and motor-bikes that allow them to move around quicker and farther. As a result, Mastatal is noisier and busier.

When I started writing this entry, I thought I would attempt to weigh the positives and negatives of the changes that are taking place. Then as I began to do so, I concluded that it's not an issue of positive or negative, but an acknowledgement of change and progress in the community. Furthermore, as a repeated visitor to the Ranch, how do I think about my responsibility amidst these changes? How do I act as a positive community member and also represent the mission of the Ranch as best as I can? And as I ask myself these questions, it seems to me that asking the questions is the important first step. Acknowledging that my actions affect the community and environment around me, will hopefully allow me to make choices that will affect that community in positive ways.

Community Facts/Stories: *El Paso de Las Lapas*

My reservation was at 8, but I thought we might poke around a bit first to get a feel for the place. The mural, a broad swath of brightly colored landscape inspired by the surrounding hills, was illuminated by the morning's rays. The hills are dominated by two huge scarlet macaws that are the restaurant's namesake, *Paso de las Lapas*. Their bright plumage caught our eyes as we made our way up the street, and we were delighted to find that the artists had been thoughtful enough to include a small rendering of PICO enjoying his morning jaunt through the hills.



Great friends in front of *El Paso de Las Lapas*
photo by Anya Rose

The Maitre D, Don CHEPO, greets us with his disarmingly blue eyes. As we are led through the crowd to the best table in the house, which offered a commanding view of the hillside and all the scenes of wildlife that it offers, I notice I order a specialty of the house – Cafe Gregoio. It has all the richness of hot chocolate with the get-down-to-business of a good coffee, mixed with a little leche and a touch of azucar. I have come prepared and brought my special mug, so it takes half the restaurant's capacity to fill the cup. Luckily I sent word ahead, so they were prepared...

First, I decided to sample the breakfast fare. I tempt my taste buds with yet another Ranch-inspired specialty, *Huevos de Jennie*. Eggs, expertly scrambled with fried onions, have the hint of ecstasy when anointed with some fresh queso during the process. Paired with thick-cut fried plantains that are so naturally sweet they'll have you calling your mama in tears and the best *gallo pinto* this side of the Rancho's gate, it's a gastronomical heaven, especially if you're one of those who just can't wait for the 9:30 brunch that's often served at 11... and even a side of *salchichón* for the inner carne fiend...

The meal is, as expected, delightful, and I appreciate the full view into the kitchen that affords me to see the kitchen crew hard at work and get to witness all the care that goes into the preparation of the dishes. We finish, and as Chepo relieves us of our plates, he confides in a low voice that they are making *ceviche* this morning. It will be ready at noon, but word spreads quickly, and that we should be there promptly before the supply runs out. It is just this sort of attention to detail that is sure to win the soda a loyal following that will assure success.

We relax with a stroll through town to aid our digestion and allow our minds to savor what the future has to offer – who would have imagined *ceviche* in Mastatal? What other culinary temptations might arrive down the road? Banana splits? While we work away the bounty that was breakfast, time passes slowly in anticipation of the delights to come. And at last, as if a week has passed, the sun reaches it's zenith and we follow the suggestions our stomachs are sending and wander out into the foot traffic of Mastatal and make our way through the crowds, where once again, Chepo has our table waiting for us. Ever the professional, he senses what we have come for, and without a word, bowls of delicious fish appear before us, accompanied (as tradition dictates) by crackers and a fresh slice of avocado. The fish is fresh and firm, the lime juice tart but not

overpowering, and the herbs a perfect match. Later, as the bowl yields its last delicious morsel to my spoon, I decide that I have room for just a little something more, and desiring a study in comparative contrasts, order a *gallo de pescado*. Hot from the grill atop corn tortillas, the fillet has just the perfect hint of crispiness about the edges, and the salt in the juicy flakes evokes memories of a childhood spent by the seashore. One could not ask for more in the afternoon, and yet here it comes, a tall, refreshing glass of *fresco de maracuja*, or passion fruit juice for those not versed in the local parlance... It is almost too much, but one cannot resist. Again, we leave with stomachs satisfied and delighted. On our way out into the midday heat, Chepo suggests that if the sun's heat should later prove overwhelming, we can retreat into the shade for a nice cone of hand-scooped ice cream that will surely take the edge of the day off and refresh our sense of purpose. Oh, how blessed are we – it's almost like being on an endless vacation...

Later that evening, having called on untold reserves of inner fortitude to resist the call of the ice cream (but promising ourselves that such discipline will be rewarded tomorrow by a double scoop), we arrive in anticipation of what the evening has in store for us. Shown yet again to our table, this time a corner seat that affords a gem of a view of the evening sky, we are at a quandary. The day has been generous to our gastronomy; should we simply sample a few of the lighter fare offered, such as a *gallo de pollo*, or stay true to the intention and standards of restaurant journalism and dive headfirst into a *casado* to sample the whole range? Journalistic integrity prevails, and we indulge. The pollo is succulent and cooked to perfection, the rice a brilliant backdrop to the tender beans, more of those delicious plantains, and a small *ensaladito* round out the dish and add a splash of color. The smells do not deceive; everything is as delicious as it portends to be. Straining to finish the last bites, a fresh Cafe Gregorio arrives (this time in a house mug, more appropriately sized for the time of evening). The day has been a culinary delight, and a nice change of pace from the Ranch fare. Though Ranch meals are undeniably what is on the menu in any religion's version of heaven, an occasional change of pace is welcome, especially for those of us here on longer stays. For those more carnivorously inclined, Lili's can ease the cravings in between *chicharrón* runs to Puriscal. And *ceviche*, for heaven's sake, need I say more?

Be sure and drop my name when requesting a reservation – Chepo will be sure to give you the best seat in the house....



Comida Corner:Sauerkraut!

Sounding the conch for dinner is a tradition at Rancho Mastatal

We have been fermenting up a storm since DESA gave us **Wild Fermentation: The**

Flavor, Nutrition, and Craft of Live-cultureFoods by Sandor Ellix Katz. This book has truly revolutionized our kitchen as of late and the condiment shelf in the fridge is bulging and our bellies are happy. Sauerkraut is one of the favorites as of late and we can't seem to keep up with the consumption. Once a 4-liter jar is broken out we seem to devour it in two days! Here is the basic recipe, but you can add whatever you please (our current fave is garlic with mustard seeds). It is really easy to make so make some yummy fermented cabbage today!!! Thanks Sandor for the inspiration and great book! I also highly recommend his new book **The Revolution Won't Be Microwaved**.

Timeframe: 1 to 4 weeks (or more)

Special Equipment:

- Ceramic crock or food-grade plastic bucket, 1-gallon/4-liter capacity or greater,
- Plate that fits inside crock or bucket,
- 1-gallon/4-liter jug filled with water (or a scrubbed and boiled rock),
- Cloth cover (such as a pillowcase or towel)

Ingredients (for 1 gallon/4 liters):

5-pounds/2 kilograms cabbage

3-tablespoons/45 milliliters sea salt

Process:

1. Chop or grate cabbage, finely or coarsely, with or without hearts, however you like it. I love to mix green and red cabbage to

end up with bright pink kraut. Place cabbage in a large bowl as you chop it.

2. Sprinkle salt on the cabbage as you go. The salt pulls water out of the cabbage (through osmosis), and this creates the

brine in which the cabbage can ferment and sour without rotting. The salt also has the effect of keeping the cabbage crunchy, by inhibiting organisms and enzymes that soften it. About 3 tablespoons (45 milliliters) of salt; I just shake some on after I chop up each cabbage. I use more salt in summer, less in winter. It is possible to make kraut with less salt or with no salt at all; several salt-free kraut variations follow this recipe for those who wish to avoid salt. (Buy Sandor's book!!!)

3. Add other vegetables, if you like. Grate carrots for a coleslaw-like kraut. Other vegetables that I've added include onions, garlic, seaweed, greens, Brussels sprouts, small whole heads of cabbage, turnips, beets and burdock roots. You can also add

fruits (apples, whole or sliced, are classic), and herbs and spices caraway seeds, dill seeds, celery seeds, and juniper berries are classic, but anything you like will work). Experiment.

4. Mix ingredients together and pack into crock. Pack just a bit into the crock at a time and tamp it

down hard using your fists

or any other sturdy kitchen implement. The tamping packs the kraut tight in the crock and helps force water out of the cabbage.

5. Cover kraut with a plate or some other lid that fits snugly inside the crock. Place a clean weight (such as a glass jug filled

with water) on the cover. This weight is to force water out of the cabbage and then keep the cabbage submerged under the brine. Cover the whole thing with a cloth to keep dust and flies out.

6. Press down on the weight to add pressure to the cabbage and help force water out of it. Continue doing this periodically (as

often as you think of it, every few hours), until the brine rises above the cover. This can take up to about 24 hours, as the salt

draws water out of the cabbage slowly. Some cabbage, particularly if it is old, simply contains less water. If the brine does not

rise above the plate level by the next day, add enough salt water to bring the brine level above the plate. Add about 1 tablespoon (15 milliliters) of salt to 1 cup (250 milliliters) of water and stir until

it's completely dissolved.

7. Leave the crock to ferment. I generally store the crock in an unobtrusive corner of the kitchen where I won't forget about it,

but where it won't be in anybody's way. You could also store it in a cool basement if you want a slower fermentation that will preserve for longer.

8. Check the kraut every day or two. The volume reduces as the fermentation proceeds. Sometimes mold appears on the surface. Many books refer to this mold as "scum," but I prefer to think of it as a bloom. Skim what you can off of the surface; it will break up and you will probably not be able to

remove all of it. Don't worry about this. It's just a surface phenomenon, a result of contact with the air. The kraut itself is under the anaerobic protection of the brine. Rinse off the plate and the

weight. Taste the kraut. Generally it starts to be tangy after a few days, and the taste gets stronger as time passes. In the cool temperatures of a cellar in winter, kraut can keep improving for months

and months. In the summer or in a heated room, its life cycle is more rapid. Eventually it becomes soft and the flavor turns less pleasant.

9. Enjoy. I generally scoop out a bowl-or jarful at a time and keep it in the fridge. I start when the

kraut is young and enjoy its evolving flavor over the course of a few weeks. Try the sauerkraut juice that will be left in the

bowl after the kraut is eaten. Sauerkraut juice is a rare delicacy and unparalleled digestive tonic. Each time you scoop

some kraut out of the crock,

you have to repack it carefully. Make sure that the kraut is packed tight in the crock, the surface is level, and the cover and weight are clean. Sometimes brine evaporates, so if the kraut is not

submerged below brine just add salted water as necessary. Some people preserve kraut by canning and heat-processing it. This can be done; but so much of the power of sauerkraut is its aliveness

that I wonder: Why kill it?

10. Develop a rhythm. I try to start a new batch before the previous batch runs out. I remove the remaining kraut from the

crock, repack it with fresh salted cabbage then pour the old kraut and its juices over the new kraut. This gives the new batch a boost with an active culture starter.

Sandor's book has this any many more wonderful recipes and is packed with lots of nutritional information as well and we highly recommend that you check it out!

Buen provecho!!



This is the championship team with whom I played at the end of 2007.

F?tbol Follies: *Nuevo Campeonato*

There's not too much to report in the way of local fútbol news outside of the fact that TIMO, JUNIOR and ALEX have again teamed up with Los Verdes of Guarumal in a short tournament in the town of Naranjal. The first three games have resulted in 2 dismal points as the team scrambles for wins to qualify for the knockout round in three weeks. Los Verdes are obligated to scrape out 4 points in their final two games of the group stage to advance, not an easy job as the top team in the group still awaits them. On the national level, Saprissa continues to do well in the CONCACAF tournament with a recent drubbing of Houston, this year's Major League

Soccer champs. The Champions League has been whittled down to 4 teams with Manchester United, Barcelona, Arsenal/Liverpool and Chelsea/? vying for fútbol's most coveted trophy. The top leagues in Europe are wrapping up their seasons in the coming weeks as well so there's plenty of excitement on the international level. *Vamos al fútbol!*

Inspirational Impressions: Frankl

"Live as if you were living a second time, and as though you had acted wrongly the first time".

--- Victor Frankl

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew