

Rancho Mastatal Updates

August 2008

We're heading into the homestretch of yet another eventful and fun-filled year at the Ranch. It's hard to believe that we'll be turning seven in November.

Time continues to slip on by. Robin and I are headed to lovely Upstate New York towards the end of September for 10 or so weeks of family and friend visits and catching up on our scheduling and website updates. We're tentatively planning on seeing friends in VT, NY, MD, ME and MA. No trip to the West Coast this year with the newborn. Our productive summer internship is wrapping up. We have a new chicken coop, an almost finished couple's cabin, a nearly finished shower structure, a beautiful bookshelf and stool, a much-improved toolshed, and tons more to show for everyone's efforts. A heartfelt thanks to BREE, LOWRI, DOM, RACHEL, DANIEL, JENNIE, JASON, AIMEE, KRISTI, and HERNG for making it arguably the best intern group we've ever had. And of course, as always, a special thank you to GREG, for everything that he does to help keep this place afloat. We have one more big group from the University of Washington to attend to this year

before focusing on training the folks that will be coming in to watch after the place while we're in the States. We have plenty to do in the coming month to prepare for our stateside departure. This time of year always gets a bit stressful for us. Please let us know if there's anything that you'd like us to update you on and, as always we love contributions to our newsletter from past visitors. Sole and Robin are both doing well. We were able to escape for a few days to the Pacific so that Sole could get her first sunburn before the upcoming trip north. We have exactly zero new pictures of the baby so if anyone reading this has any to share both with us and our readers please send them our way and we'll get them published one way or another so that you can see how her life is physically progressing. Lots of love to TIBURON who has so far passed his stem cell transplant test with flying colors. He's feeling stronger every day and hopes to be gracing us with his presence sooner than anyone expected, except of course himself.

Abrazos to everyone who will be in Seattle this fall when ALAN "SUCIA" SMITH and ROGER make their way to the Emerald City for some fun and frolicking. We'd love to be there with you all in person. A quick reminder that Bioneers by the Bay, organized by DESA and her organization the Marion Institute, will be taking place again this year during the fourth week of October in New



Flip off of the waterfall

Bedford, MA. We plan to be there alongside Alan, SPARKY, GEOFF and a host of others so please find the time to join us if you plan on being in the Northeast this fall. The last two years have been amazing fun and an awesome way to connect with Ranch friends and others interested in the environment and issues of social justice. The conference is an inspiration and will leave you feeling optimistic as we head into the big election in early November. Contact Desa or me if you need more details, or visit the Marion Institute's website at <http://www.marioninstitute.org>.

We've received numerous gifts and good wishes from many people over the last few months and we're a bit behind in responding to all of the wonderful people that have sent their love to Robin and Sole. We're working hard to write each of you individually but until then I'd like to send out a blanket "thank you and we love you" for your thoughts and presents. We received some amazing stuff including a onesie from JENNIE PERLMUTTER that boasts "The Nug" on the front. Hilarious. We can't wait until she gets big enough to sport it. It will undoubtedly be soon as she looks like a basketball more each day. We've been talking about including a book review as part of our monthly updates. Please let us know if you have any titles that you think are worth reviewing.

With that said I just finished a wonderful book titled Targeted by Deepa Fernandez about Homeland Security and immigration policy that I'd highly recommend to everyone. It sheds light on some scary realities pertaining to one of the most important issues to voters in the States today. A must read for folks interested in the eroding civil liberties of our country. Desa, the author would be a good one to get for Bioneers 2010. Would be a close commute as she resides in NYC. We can talk about it in person soon as we're looking forward to see many of you in the coming weeks and months. Until then be well.

This month's update includes:

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RM Program News:Lakeside

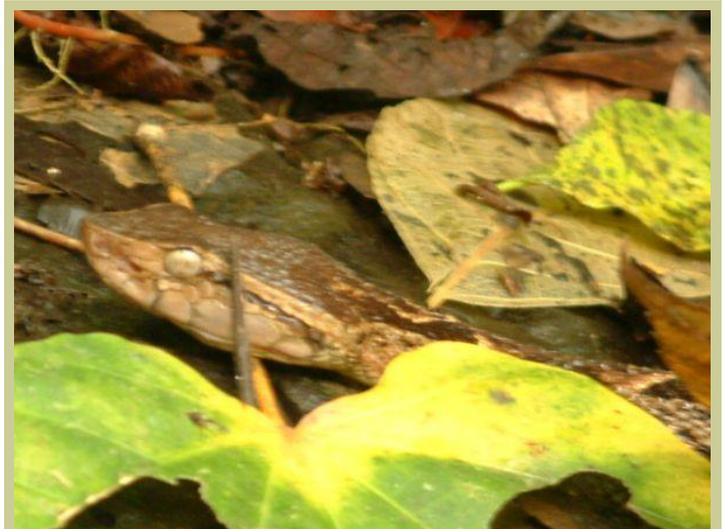
We recently said goodbye to our second middle school group from the Lakeside School in Seattle, WA after a wonderful inspired visit. The group's leaders, ROB, ANNIE and ALICIA handled the group expertly. Alicia wrote the following article. Thanks so much for your contribution both with the group and with what follows.

A dozen excited ninth graders from Lakeside School's (Seattle) second Global Service Learning trip to Costa Rica arrived in Mastatal on July 23rd. Our introduction to Costa Rica was punctuated by a dramatic thunderstorm over Puriscal as we ate lunch and watched the water rushing down the streets! Our adventures and our lessons in flexibility really began when we were 20 minutes past town and a truck driver told us the road had washed out and was impassable further on. We headed south to the coast and then turned north to approach from La Gloria. Six hours later, exhausted from nearly 24 hours of travel, we arrived to warm greetings from Tim, Robin, Soledad, and several interns, a delicious dinner and welcome beds. The cicada sound scape was drowned by thunder and lightning through the night marking our dramatic transition to this new environment.

In the morning our guide, Angela Costanzo, from Tropical Adventures in Education, led us through the rainforest down to the waterfall where a cool swim washed us of our travel fatigue. On the trail back to the rancho the sharp eyes of our trip leader, Rob Burgess, spotted a terciopelo sleeping curled up just off the trail. How he spotted it among the camouflaging leaf litter is a wonder to me! Angela pointed out so many new plants, insects, and frogs as we wind our way up the trail: curving buttress roots, gold and red spikes of Heliconia, the pungent pink citronella berry, green spotted poison dart frogs, and the yellow footed millipede. A whole new world to learn!

After lunch we met the talented group of interns here. Tim gave us an overview of the systems at the ranch and the students begin to understand the concept of sustainability by seeing it in action and learning why conserving water is important, how a composting toilet results in a rich fertilizer, and how to keep the septic system working well where there is no pump truck! Our tour of the many buildings and projects around the property give us a perspective on the other aspects of living sustainably and in harmony with this lush environment: the wattle and daub construction on outbuildings, the beautiful local woods and bamboo poles used for structural supports, and the fragrant and edible flora all around—wild ginger, papaya, starfruit, passionfruit.

Today, as our students work with the interns on trail construction, wood hauling, lime washing the walls of a new building, and preparing food in the kitchen they are sinking happily into the natural rhythms of life here. "Everything about this place is peaceful, and the sense of community is so



Terciopelo

photo by Claudio Pinzauti

different from what you find in a metropolitan place like Seattle," says Sofia. Many of her classmates echo this feeling.

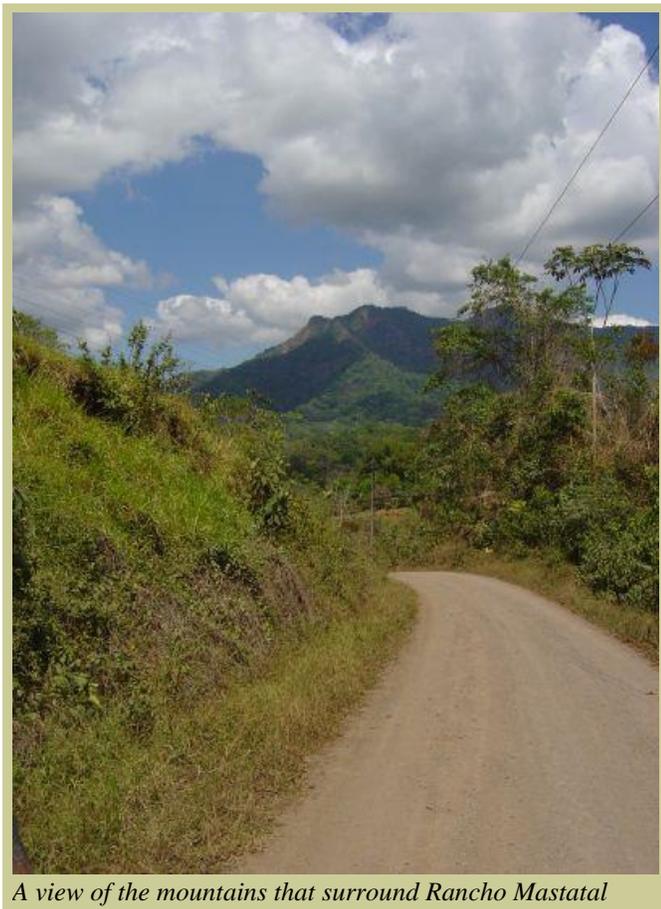
"I like the community atmosphere: everyone coming together from different places to work and live here, all having a great time. Working together builds friendships," observes Gus, sweaty and dirt streaked from hauling wood. (A promised trip down to the waterfall will be a welcome reward!)

Maddie and Daley both remark on how they "love the slower pace and the community feeling of this place." Karl likes the sense of "the whole community working together and for each other, supporting each other – everyone is friendly. It's nice!"

"The natural beauty all around, the never-ending sounds of cicadas and insects and birds, and being right in the midst of the rainforest is amazing," says Makayla.

There is no doubt our students will return from this experience transformed in many ways!

Alicia Hokanson, July 27, 2008



A view of the mountains that surround Rancho Mastatal

Conservation Report: Roads

Conserving the state of our roads this time of year seems at times an impossibility. Around the middle of every August, weekly stories of mudslides and washed out roads reach our home as incoming volunteers and guests share stories of slogging through mud and surviving hair-raising curves on their way to Mastatal. Yep, it's officially mud season here, and hopes of safeguarding the tranquility of our little town rise during this time of year. One might also argue that hopes of preserving some folk's sanity fall. We're just about to enter into the rainiest part of our year. This means for us that it's time for our annual foray stateside, where road conditions are a bit more dependable though a lot less enjoyable. One gets used to driving 12 mph on average with little hurry to get from A to B. When the reality that driving 75 mph on US highways is just too damn slow for most motorists on the road, it gets downright scary after spending the year in a beat up 1988 4-Runner that barely makes it out of second gear.

Nobody in your rear view mirror one second and the next someone flashing their lights at you to get out of their f***ing way, and that's in the non-

passing lane. Talk about a threat to one's mental state. Are conserving the state of our roads more important than conserving the state of our mental well-being? Perhaps a question for the ages. Nevertheless, at this stage of my life, I'll take shitty roads over insanity.

Building Report: Kevin

Our most recent structure was named before it was even built, a rare occurrence here. The Ranch's chicken coup, nicknamed after everyone's favorite Hollywood superstar, KEVIN COSTNER, is just about ready to receive its first tenants. Due to our ever-increasing demand for eggs, we've outstripped the local supply and have been forced to bring in some reinforcements from home base. Kevin, his construction headed up by summer intern KRISTI KNUDSON, could most likely withstand some major earth movement as it ain't your everyday chicken coup. You might call it the Cadillac of



Interns Kristi and Herng working on the new chicken coop

chicken coups as what started as a "let's get it up fast" structure turned into a beautiful timberframe edifice that would proudly be home to a bed and table for a single guest. After seeing the structure and contemplating its future, lamenting that it would be home to chickens instead of humans, some guests suggested that it become the Ranch's bar, home to the Ranch Jacuzzi, or a single's cabin for paying guests. Nevertheless, we've resisted the temptation and will be buying our first hens in the coming months. Kristi did a fabulous job heading up the project, her first full-scale building. She's learned a lot and will hopefully put her new skills to use in the near future back in the States. She'll soon be composing a letter to Mr. Costner himself to see about rights to name the chickens after each of his characters' roles in what have become unarguably some of the most amazing blockbuster hits to make it on to the big screen ever.

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Along the Trail after Swimming the Rio Negro

The maraca shimmer of cicadas' calls
Is a curtain of sound in the green stillness.
Down trail the rush of river rises
Up from rocks we jumped from.
High twitter of bird calls punctuates the silver rattle
As our boots cake with red mud
And our eyes and ears open.

Alicia Hokanson 7/26/08



photo by Aimee Gaines

Community Facts/Stories: Becoming Part of a Community

Sitting snugly in the heart of the small, hilltop hamlet of Mastatal, el Rancho Mastatal is a real community within a community. A dictionary definition provides some clues as to what “community” means: people living in the same location, sharing the same governance, with common interests and values, interacting and depending on each another. So what does it mean to join the Ranch, even if only for a little while?



Lily and Chepo's soda

As one of the new interns here, I am amazed at how quickly I am fitting in to the rhythm of life here. Although in some ways it is no surprise. We are all here because we are interested in what the Ranch does (for example, natural building) and what it stands for – communicating and demonstrating how to live sustainability, supporting the people of Mastatal through the Mastate Foundation, protecting and rehabilitating the local rainforest and, not least, creating an inclusive and welcoming place to be.

The Ranch depends on everyone sharing responsibility for essential day-to-day tasks - the most important of which is cooking the delicious meals we all enjoy eating. Like the start of any great relationship, arriving interns and volunteers and Ranch residents enjoy a period of mutual exploration, evolving trust, guidance and ultimately a shared purpose as we develop individual

projects which contribute to the Ranch and the wider community of Mastatal. For me this is an opportunity to grow as a person too: to learn new skills, widen my horizons and to reflect on what I will take away from the whole experience.

This is a dynamic community, people come and go, staying anywhere from a few days, to weeks, months and in some cases years (ask Greg!). Nevertheless, the spirit of the Ranch remains the same, held fast by founders Tim and Robin. As the ‘elders’ of this small community, they remember the Ranch’s beginnings, the dream behind it and everything that has been achieved since its inception. They are also the bridge to the people of Mastatal, helping Tico neighbours to make sense of this eccentric bunch of gringos!

I have an impact on the people of Mastatal simply by being here. Well, not me personally, but foreigners in general. Over the past seven years as the Ranch has grown, the village has changed. Eco-tourism, already a major source of income for Costa Rica, is spreading through home grown initiatives such as Iguana Chocolate, Cabañas Siempre Verde, Villas Mastatal, the new Soda and increased Tico-Gringo traffic at the Pulperia (the local bar opposite the Ranch). You might think this is all good for a poor rural area in a developing country?

Actually, no it is not. Drink and drugs are becoming a problem, casual sex is an awkward subject for those who live here all time and hard economic realities point to tourism providing an easy buck. The trouble is not all the people around here can have a ‘tourism’ job. Most young men around here work the land for a dollar an hour; a beer will cost about an hour and a half’s hard labour. Despite everyone’s best intentions this aspect of “community” is much harder to anticipate, difficult to adjust to and probably impossible to control.

So back to my first question: what does it mean to become part of the Ranch community, if only for a little while? The answer probably goes something like this: laughing with new friends, sharing fun and responsibilities, learning new things, respecting differences, and perhaps most importantly being mindful of what we contribute to the community outside our gates.

Comida Corner: Half-Moon Dumplings

Intern Heng Tzou introduced these scrumptious delights to the Ranch this summer. They've become a favorite. Give them a shot. They're well worth the effort.

Makes 50

Ingredients:

Dough for Wrappers:

6 cups flour/wheat flour (plus a bit more for rolling the wrappers)

3-teaspoons salt

1 ½ to 2 cups cold water

Process:

1. Put the flour and salt in a large mixing bowl and gradually stir in the cold water until the dough comes together in a ball. The dough should be quite dry. Knead it for about 5 minutes.
2. Shape the dough into a ball, dust with flour, and cover with a bread towel. Let it rise for 30 minutes to an hour.
3. Knead the ball for a minute and cut the dough into 2 pieces. Roll the dough until 1/16" thick. I use a jar to cut the dough into a round shape. Collect the rest of the dough and make the same size round shape wrapper. Do same thing to the other piece of dough. Dust the wrappers with flour.

You can always add herbs into the dough or tomato/spinach juice to make it a different color. Reduce the amount of water when using any juice.

Filling for Wrappers: each makes about 20 dumplings

Option 1

¾ cup chopped cabbage or bok choy

¼ cup carrot, julienne

¼ cup celery, julienne

a little bit of broccoli (or a little bit of this a little bit of that, you decide)

1 teaspoon peeled and minced fresh ginger

1-teaspoon rice wine

1-teaspoon sugar

1-tablespoon soy sauce



1-tablespoon sesame oil
salt and black pepper
Mix them all together

Option 2

4 chopped tomatoes (use a sieve to drain the juice and you can use the juice in the wrapper dough)
4 eggs
2 teaspoons thyme
salt
Scramble eggs with tomato

Option 3

4 chopped onion
salt and pepper
cheese

These are just 3 fillings we have used. You can use anything you want. These are the Chinese equivalent to the empanada.

Now you are ready to stuff these half-moon goodies.

Stretch the wrapper a little bit then put a tablespoon of filling in the center of the circle.
Bring one edge of the wrapper over the filling to meet the other and seal!

Now you are ready to cook these puppies!

1. In a cast iron skillet (if you don't have one any fry pan will do) heat some oil until hot.
2. Fry the dumpling until brown and crispy on the bottom
3. Pour some water into the pot (about 1/5 the dumplings height) and put a lid on the skillet.
This is to steam and cook the dumpling.
4. Wait about 3-5 minutes and check to make sure the wrapper is cooked (eat it to test it).
5. When it is cooked leave the lid on and let the rest of the water all evaporate. (The dumpling bottom should be crispy).

Dipping Sauce:

4 tablespoons soy sauce
1-tablespoon sesame oil
1-tablespoon vinegar or lemon juice
minced garlic
minced ginger
minced green onion
chili flakes
minced cilantro (optional)

Serve with dipping sauce and enjoy!! Buen Provecho!!

F?tbol Follies: Poised for the Playoffs

Our team officially finished at the top of the table of the current regional tournament. This has afforded us the luxury of two weeks of rest before our semifinal match against a yet undetermined opponent. We wrapped up the group stage with a fairly convincing 3-0 win over the team from Arenal. We've yet to compile our entire team for a match, something we hope to do for the semis, which will be great but may result in some tough decisions for our coach ROLANDO, as he'll have to make some difficult calls as to who to start for that game. Perhaps an enviable problem to have as a coach and a nerve-wracking reality for players who expect and want to play every game in its entirety. We'll keep you posted up in the coming weeks. The semis are scheduled to be played on September 7 and the finals on September 21, just a week shy of the 1-year anniversary of our championship last year. Let's hope for a repeat.

Inspirational Impressions: Our Admin

Question: How many Bush-administration officials does it take to screw in a light bulb?

Answer: None. There is nothing wrong with the light bulb; its conditions are improving every day. Any report of its lack of incandescence is a delusional spin by the liberal media. That light bulb has served honorably, and anything you say about its going out undermines the lighting effect. Why do you hate freedom?

--- Source Unknown