

# Rancho Mastatal Updates

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## December 2008

Here you go, the last Ranch newsletter of 2008 and the first edition of 2009 all in one. We've been putting this publication on your screens for seven years now. It's been at times a pleasure and others a burden. Our dedication has been more or less unbending for such a small yet growing readership. We hope that you can glean at least something small from each publication.

We've been debating on making this a quarterly as our list of responsibilities continues to grow by leaps and bounds leaving us less and less time to attend to the important work of keeping you abreast of life in Mastatal while documenting in some way the goings on at the Ranch. Happy Belated Hoildays to everyone out there. Two-thousand and eight was quite a year, as most seem to be, and the beginning of 2009 has been epic. We wish you happiness and health throughout the new year. Due to the busy nature of people's lives this time of year, we're going to try something new, at least this time around; short entries. Maybe, maybe.

If you have the tendency to read only part or parts of the newsletter each month, please make sure that you don't miss Anna McEvoy's poem at the very end of this one before filing it away. Enjoy.

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*Alex working on the Cork*

*photo by A. Smith*



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

### **RM Program News: Solar Goodness**

With the help of IAN WOOFENDEN, his daughter ROSE, renewable energy expert E.H. ROY and the class from Solar Energy International (SEI) we recently installed four new photovoltaic systems in the towns of Mastatal, San Vicente and San Miguel. Three of the installations were destined for limited-resource families in the area while the fourth panel is proudly donning the roof of La Casucha bringing light to those already fortunate residents of this sweet structure.

One of the highlights of the week-long course was bringing light to the family of JUAN LUIS and ANNA in San Vicente. They live a 25-minute walk from the road near DIMO and MARITZA'S house towards the middle of nowhere. Access to the national electricity grid is prohibitively expensive given the remote access. Their slightly framed house, currently without walls, sits on a little knoll looking out to a stunning view of Cerro Cangreja. We had been talking with Juan Luis for over a year about the possibility of providing them with power via a small

solar setup with the help of SEI. The home site has wonderful solar exposure and provided a fabulous opportunity for the class to help bring lights to a needy local family. The family is presently enjoying nighttime illumination from their new system presenting opportunities for the family's children to read and study after sunset for the first time. It was an empowering experience for both the students and recipients. After a long day of stripping wire, running conduit, and climbing on the hot tin roof, the glowing peak of La Cangreja rewarded the class with its beauty for their amazing work as they trudged, sweaty and smiling, back to the main road for the trip back to the Ranch.

## Conservation Update: Sanity

This time of year tends to be an exercise in conserving one's sanity. Christmas Eve slipknot Christmas Day slipknot Boxing Day slipknot the University of South Dakota slipknot SEI slipknot new interns slipsknot WFR course, slipknot WEMT course.

Take a deep breath. This is one of our most hectic times of the year and necessitates the development of personal techniques that helps one keep it all together. It can be non-stop at times. Yoga and meditation are long-time Ranch favorites to keep one balanced but this year it seems as if basketball, Ultimate Frisbee, soccer and horseshoes might give these other classics a run for their money. Regardless of how one gets it done, conserving one's sanity in this environment can at times be a challenge, but a welcome one by most that call Mastatal their winter home.



*Sole and Anna*



*Cob work site*

## Building Report: 2009

We've kicked off yet a new year of building projects. Even though we're striving to expend more time and energy this year in getting our gardens and fields producing more food for the Ranch, there will still be plenty of building going on. It will continue to be a focus for at least one more season when we hope to start putting more resources towards agriculture. On the construction docket for the early part of this year we have the following:

### *The Cork*

We'll be adding the two bedrooms, finishing the walls to the shared communal space that

will connect the new spaces, building a composting toilet and shower edifice amongst a host of other projects over at the Cork this year. GRANDELÓN, TY GUY and SUCIA are back in Mastatal for the winter to head up Cork-related projects. This will be one of our main building sites this year and promises to be a productive one.

### *The Methane Biodigester*

We're making every effort to design and build a methane biodigester this year so that we can start using the shit that we've been turning into fertilizer over the past years to also produce gas that we can cook with in our kitchen. We're planning on adding another toilet to the Main House facilities that we will connect to a large cylindrical plastic bag that will store the methane that's produced as the human waste breaks down. The methane will then be piped directly to the Ranch's kitchen to

provide gas to cook with.

### ***The Toolshed***

The toolshed is built yet still does not play home to any tools. We're planning to remedy that situation this winter and hope to do it relatively soon. We need to build shelves, a tool sharpening station, a battery charging area, personal lockable boxes and more so that we can move the tools away from the kitchen area and closer to the workshop once and for all.

Much more to come soon.

### **Volunteer/Guest Gossip: St. Valentine's Day/Pedro's Bon Voyage**

#### *Country Western Falls in Love with Reggae Lingerie/Pajama Jam*

The holiday started with an afternoon snack of Anna's heart shaped shortbread cookies drizzled with chocolate... this was sure to be *día de amor*.

With the Ranch's very own cupids, Anna and Maria, anonymous Valentine notes of love and sweet nothings were delivered. Managing to get a look at some they read such sentiments as; "U R A QT", "Meet me at the compost toilet at midnight", "Your breath smells good", "You are the Ping to my Pong", " You light up the room with your smile", "U R A Gem", "Can I pop that sexy pimple on your back?", "I choo-choo-choose you", "If you scratch my bites I will scratch yours", "Roses are red, Violets are blue, Why is it you always smell like poo?" you get the idea....

The evening circle was complete as the entire group arrived dressed according to the theme. Amazing power the threat of "Costume Required for Admittance to Dinner" can carry. Dave let his daughter's paint a hot pink bra directly on his chest; Joe the six foot four former steel worker from Boston clad in nothing but a sarong, necklace, purple gloves and eyeliner; Stephanie as an actual "cow- girl" complete with bridal and saddle bags. Willie Nelson (Robin) at the head of the table, at her side is Timo, Geoff, John, and Alan like the playboy bunnies in their silky drawers; Greg in his Heff looking smoking jacket, and Teggert in his blue and jewel encrusted frock accessorized with a tiara of fern leaves.

In the kitchen with M.I.A. getting the party started: Jodee the Rasta Rabbit; Nicole under a fabulous-wish-it-were-real-afro wig; Ann in every pattern ever made; and reggae-tuff Naima made our bountiful meal of eggplant parmiggiano, complete with Andrea's hand-made Ricotta cheese and sweet beet messages that read: "Text Me", and "Eat Me". Followed by the ever-loved, chocolate filled black bean brownies for dessert.

Let us not forget Pedro, who pulled it together for his last night and took on the alter ego of the innocent-looking southern belle. We will miss you around here for sure little fruitcake. Thanks for the "Honey Mostard Mayonaise". Enjoy your Eleven-hour flight back home.

Never before have I spent a Valentine's Day with such genuine celebration of love, fun, laughter,

and a lusty appreciation for chocolate. My spirit award goes out to Erin who took her time to write everyone heartfelt valentines. Her note to Sole is a V-Day Haiku:

Sloe- what a gal!  
Thanks for claiming all  
Our farts  
What humility

Next Holiday is Mardi Gras on February 24th Guess what we will be showing ;)

-Max

### **Community Facts/Stories: *Una Tormenta Perfecta***

It made the front page of the Washington Post and the New York Times—two days in a row. CNN did on-site, real-time reporting round the clock within an hour of its onset. The Discovery Channel is coming out with a four part miniseries next month that will detail each nail biting, eye-widening twist and turn. And Oprah is flying out to assess the damage. Yup, the world watched with bated breath the first week of February as a two-day windstorm racked Costa Rica, sending its worst to Mastatal.

Well, perhaps international "bated breath" is a bit of an exaggeration, but Mother Nature's tantrum certainly demanded all of the Ranch's energy for over 48 hours. The wind started to pick up Wednesday morning, and by the late afternoon, we were wishing we had a turbine in the front yard. As dinner preparations were underway and students were still arriving for the beginning of the month long Emergency Medical Technician course, the power flickered off and on, finally cutting out altogether.

That first night was an experience unlike any other. The afternoon winds had whisked away most of the moisture we've become accustomed to, leaving us in need of copious amounts of lotion, chapstick, and beer. We stood in the front yard as the wind whipped around us, entranced by an almost full moon surrounded by faint clouds and a circular rainbow of colored light. As folks started toward bed, snooze time was delayed by the need for chainsaws and muscles to cut and haul trees out of the road and off roofs.

Over in the Hankey, us interns nuzzled under the covers around 9:30 hoping to sleep through the madness. After an hour or so of what sounded like a combination tsunami and papaya attack on the roof, the folks in the upper floors and more exposed areas hauled mattresses and bedding to the main floor. But even this comforting slumber party was interrupted when normally calm Britt issued some less than loving words to a scorpion who had blown in and bitten her. A swift, Patton-like maneuver involving water bottles and broom handles ensued to dispatch the confused aggressor. Needless to say, it was a long night for all Ranchers. Sam and Alan, bunking in the main house, frantically tried to secure the shutters as the contents of the jungle were being blown inside. Instructors Dave and Andrea moved themselves and their two daughters out of the normally magical tree-house atmosphere of the Hooch and into Jeanne's. Folks in

Jeanne's wondered if their own roof would hold as they heard the roofs of the drying pavilion and garden shed being torn apart. It was a strange night of mixed emotions: awe, fright, excitement and exhaustion.

The next day as the sun rose and the wind died down for a bit, we were stunned by the views. First, the famous La Cangreja mountain was unusually visible from almost anywhere on the property because of the vast amounts of downed leaves and trees. Secondly, everyone noticed how confused the wildlife was—Carolyn saw four (typically shy) monkeys in plain sight, and everyone commented on the multitude of strange, displaced spiders and flying bugs that seemed to make a beeline for our bodies. The destruction was even more evident though in the sad views of the Ranch's property and Mastatal in general: whole roofs had been ripped off of many buildings in town (including a friend who had even tied his down to his car), a neighbor's chicken coop was destroyed, all of the Ranch's olive green awnings flapped freely in their new torn and mangled state, our friend Mario's biodigester had been punctured, and trees dangled precariously on power lines. The wind blew towels, t-shirts and toothpaste out of our homes and into the forest for the lizards to enjoy, and our poor dry gardens were now heating up even more under a quilt of leaves.

Luckily, no one in the area was seriously hurt, even with similar conditions during the day and night on Thursday, including the loss of water added to no electricity. As folks at the Ranch are apt to do, though, we made the best of it. Kattia, Laura and helpers cooked delicious mac and cheese, pinto and pea soup despite rough kitchen conditions. We dove into Ranch cleanup and regular projects with gusto. And in the evenings of those two memorable days, songs from voices and guitars floated from the main house into the breezy beyond as we gave our best shot at coaxing the storm to sleep.

### **Comida Corner: Pedro's Special Sauce (AKA Honey Mosterd Mayonaise)**

Peter, Leo and Nelly's son from Holland (hence the mosterd), put a new twist on the Ranch's favorite condiment which, as most of you know, the majority of people can not go a meal without. We usually stick with the old fav' chipotle mayo, but Pedro pushed the limits and brought us this new yummy twist on the old standby.

This recipe is for Ranch appetites and usually lasts a meal or two, but for use for a family of 4 (instead of 40) you may want to reduce the quantities a bit.

- 4 whole eggs
- 6 or 7½ cups of oil
- 1 cup mustard
- ¼ cup honey
- pinch of cinnamon
- 2 teaspoons white vinegar
- juice of one lemon
- 7 cloves of garlic
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper

1 teaspoon *chipotle*

1. Put the eggs, mustard, honey, cinnamon, vinegar, salt, peppers in a food processor.
2. Add the oil carefully to the mix. Wait until the mayo is thick enough then add the rest of the ingredients. Run the processor once more, a minute or so until mixed and then enjoy!



*Guarumal Soccer*

### **F?tbol Follies: The Return of *Los Gal?cticos***

This winter sees the return of Mastatal's dynamic f?tbol squad *Los Gal?cticos*. The team has been reinforced with more gringos than ever with T-BONE, GRANDEL?N, RED, NICOLE, TIMO, SAM and TAGGART all seeing good time. The new look *Gal?cticos* saw their first action a few weeks back in San Vicente against a solid side from Junquillo, just outside of Puriscal. *Los Gal?cticos* arguably dominated the game throughout even though they had to fight hard to tie the game late in the second half to take home a draw in the first fixture of the new season. The team

has since played three more matches tying the first and winning the others, the last game in dominant fashion, a 4-1 drudging of a solid team from Puriscal. The squad has games lined up for the next few weekends and plans to be a force to reckon with by the end of the summer. *Los Gal?cticos* are starting to gain quite the reputation in the area and everyone's enjoying the revival of one of the most heralded teams in local f?tbol history.



*the Iridescent Blue Morpho Butterfly*

### **Inspirational Impressions: A Poem by Anna McEvoy**

*Rancho Mastatal*  
A poem by Anna McEvoy age 10

Of all the places on land and sea,  
Rancho Mastatal is the best place for me.

With waterfalls and banana trees,  
and cicadas buzzing in the leaves.

Beautiful views of "La Cangreja",  
the mountain that is 1,000 times bigger than una abeja.

Poison dart frogs jump around,  
and bright green snakes slither on the ground.

Handmade soap and outdoor showers,  
beautiful flowers with eccentric colors.

The food here is absolutely wonderful.

And once a week we have bagel night.  
The bagels are cooked in a hot cob oven,  
they're so good I just love `em.

Scarlet Macaws circle high above,  
and toucans squawk at peaceful doves.

Shiny Blue Morphos flutter about,  
and in my mind there is no doubt,  
that there are big cities and amusement parks,  
zoos and aquariums with real live sharks,  
there are fun concerts with loud, loud music,  
and the Statue of Liberty, which is gi-huge-ic,  
but of all the places that I've been,  
Rancho Mastatal is the best of them!

*Abrazos,*

The Ranch Crew