

Rancho Mastatal Updates

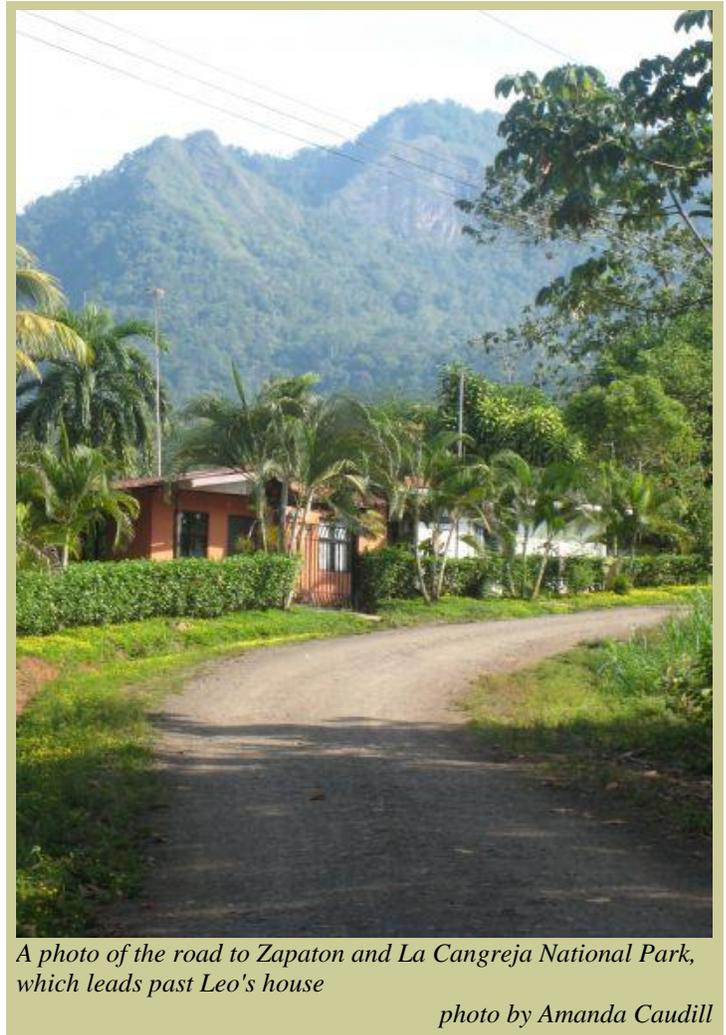
May 2007

Rancho Mastatal UPDATE for the month of MAY 2007 Water, and lots of it, has been one of the many themes these past weeks in Mastatal. We've had the rainiest May, over two-feet of precipitation, since we arrived in Mastatal more than five years ago. It felt like September for much of the month though it seems as if the June weather's normalizing a bit with a more typical rainy season weather pattern, sunny mornings giving way to cloudy afternoons, characterizing the beginning of the new month.

We are finally at the end of the annual volunteer transition as the last of the winter crew heads back to homes and families, world travels, or local Costa Rican adventures. A SMITH and MAXINE are back in Joysey, returning to their pre-Mastatal reality, while NATE and KAREN packed their lives back into their backpacks and returned to the States eventually headed to hook up with Sparky and others in our old home of Seattle. TYLER's on his way to Ecuador to travel

South America with his close friend. They'll be plying the roads of Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and others in their recently purchased Land Cruiser. We love you guys immensely but feel a bit slighted by the enormous hole you left behind. We hope to see you ALL this fall. Our Seattle plans get a bit more solid with each day that passes. GREG, the last bastion of the snowbirds, hit the road temporarily, or water really, and left for a few weeks to travel with a friend through the Panama Canal on a brand spankin' new sailboat headed to Seattle from Venezuela but has already returned for a few more months to work on a house for Tiburón.

The invierno crew is slowly filtering in. These last few weeks marked a handful of huge goodbyes but also numerous hellos. Everything should begin settling down a bit the first week of June before our next group from Seattle University finds their way here, that's assuming that the road is still passable then. We hope you enjoy the May addition and please write us with news from your worlds when you get a minute.



A photo of the road to Zapaton and La Cangreja National Park, which leads past Leo's house

photo by Amanda Caudill

This month's update includes:

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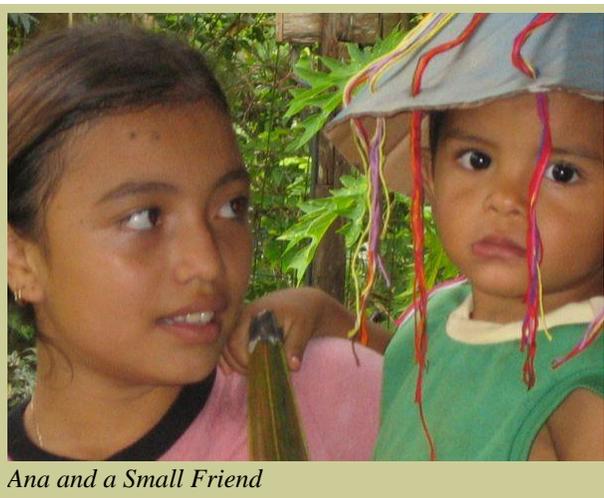


Beautiful mushroom

RM Program News: Dawg Update

The U-Dub group led by SUSAN continues to fill the Ranch with energy, curiosity, song and dance. Their occasional weekend excursions leave things quiet and arguably a bit dull as our headcount without them is down to about 12. The students are deep into the heart of their projects, and fill their free time acquiring points for participating in community activities. At any given moment during the day, you may find the group making soap, baking bread, working at the school, gardening, chasing frogs down the trails, counting bromeliads up in the canopy or curiously exploring mushrooms.

The crew has been lively and willing to participate in pretty much anything and everything, even smearing poo in their free time. Injuries have taken a toll on a few bodies, but overall spirits are still quite high. It's difficult to imagine the group is more than half way through their quarter abroad though we're looking forward to the remainder of their stay.



Ana and a Small Friend

Building Report: *El Ranchito*

One of our current building projects is taking place at the primary school in town. LEE TRAYNHAM one of the University of Washington students is leading the project to build a small thatch hut so that children have a covered area to eat breakfast and generally hang out! DON DANILO from San Miguel is assisting with the roof and is one of the few people left in the area with the knowledge and the skills to build the palm thatch roof. While Lee, ALEX, GILBERTH and I started digging and pouring the foundations for the teak uprights, Danilo, JUNIOR and CHEPO went to cut and prepare the palma Royal that is going to be used for the roof. Just hanging out

at the school was fun in itself watching the kids run manically around playing some form of hide and seek which involved plenty of screaming and shrieking! As I commented to Alex how fun it would be to be a kid again it occurred to me that living at RM is probably as good and we don't get homework!! As we finished adjusting the forms and prepared the area for pouring, three students from the U of W turned up at the school to play some games with the kids which inevitably led to more shrieking and screaming. As we watched them all playing we couldn't help but chuckle at MOI, Laura's eldest son, who seemed to be the only person actually following the rules and getting frustrated with his non-rule abiding peers. The next day with the foundations poured the U of W group left for Monteverde and the now we have to wait several days for the palm thatch to cure. More to come soon about this project.

Conservation Report: Rolling Blackouts

With a foot of rain during a two-week period spanning April and May here in Mastatal, it was hard to comprehend how, in a country mostly powered by water, the national telecommunications and electricity company, ICE, had to recently implement rolling blackouts throughout the country. We've heard a number of different stories as to why we had to endure daily power outages for a two-week period but it seems as if reduced rainfall nationwide was the main culprit. Even though power cuts are nothing new to us in Mastatal; it's been a part of life here since our arrival, but to think that businesses other institutions throughout the country were forced to shut down for a number of hours each day due to low rainfall and a marked increase in demand was certainly disconcerting.

It presses me to think of all of the condominiums and gated communities that are sprouting up everywhere along the Central Pacific Coast. Where will their electricity come from to power these new developments that will undoubtedly demand an extraordinary amount of electricity, some of it to power air conditioners, hair driers, and fences to keep out unwanted locals? Will the result be more dams in our region, coal- fired plants, or a national policy to conserve electricity? Nobody at this stage in time really knows. We can only hope and push for an increase in a more extensive national renewable energy policy that will limit the amount of dams that continue to take away our whitewater and habitat for our animals. And of course a few prayers for more rain to fill up the country's reservoirs, but please, here in Mastatal, we could use a little break from the multiple-inch days of rains in our immediate vicinity, at least for a few days so that we dry our clothes. Please direct any prayers to the Central Valley.

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: In the Vol World

As Ranch visitors come and go, and old timers return for another dose of the good life here in Mastatal, the unforgettable legends that are just too good to be left in the past sometimes become reintroduced to life here at RM. Perhaps some of you readers have experienced the wrath of a historic, marvelous game. If you haven't enjoyed the torture first hand, then you loyal readers will remember Rob Hankey's brilliant recounting for the wondrous game of **Maui!** from a few newsletters back. That's right, reintroduced compliments of COURTNEY, the wonder that is Maui is back in full force. Beware, once you inquire into what makes this game so amazing, it will most certainly take you over. Word of Maui parties have come to us here at the ranch, as our friends and former volunteers gather to play in far away places like Seattle. If you yourself have come to

love/hate this game as much as the rest of us, please send word of your addiction so we may keep you in our thoughts.

Another major life change here at the Ranch has come compliments of GREG and it's all the rage around these parts. Our very own **hand-cranked washing machine** sits proudly in the main house garden and is virtually in constant use. Its sturdy wood base only requires a patch of land about 2' X 4' and best of all, no electricity. The basin is a reused 28-gallon bucket and sits in a spinning steel frame. The side handle, about 12" long, pivots around and around resulting in quite the upper body workout as the clothes progress through the spin cycle, drain cycle, and then the rinse cycles. Its permanent home will include a large gravel base, allowing for better drainage. In the meantime, volunteers, students, and the entire crew are loving the new addition, and the clothes are truly smelling so fresh and so clean, clean!

This last weekend was one of the great community gatherings, BINGO night at the community center. The women of Mastatal get together to cook a huge meal for everyone in town. Everyone gathers at 6 to eat and socialize, and then around 7, the gaming begins. It costs 800 colones (about a buck fifty) for the bingo card but the embarrassment by the ticos when you can't translate the numbers fast enough, is free. Juan Luis always calls the numbers; sitting with his lap-table at arms length, he pulls the numbered wooden balls from a plastic juice pitcher and quickly slurs each number. To keep everyone on their toes, he occasionally adds a descriptor to the number (such as "*una muchacha bonita ... quince!*") always causing mass confusion at the gringo table. The best part of Bingo night is the prizes. Since this is a church fundraiser, all the prizes are donations from the homes of the women who coordinate. This last round, TYLER won women's deodorant, a washcloth, and a little bottle of hand lotion smelling of the 80's. It's not uncommon to win an old tablecloth, four used juice glasses, or in my case, a set of two plastic, flowered salad plates.

Community Facts/Stories: *Que ondas en Mastatal?*

As usual, enduring the day-to-day routines such as waking up next to an earthy cob wall and rolling over in bed to look out into the rainforest canopy as I scribble down brief records of my double life as an oneironaut... bantering with Caraca about his talents as a fisherman for longhaired bipedals as we piece together the teak tower collectively known as the Hankey Pankey Crib... surviving the teasings of *las brujas de comida casera* while trying to learn how to converse in Spanish and how to cook delicious vegetarian meals for a couple dozen mouths at the same time... deciding which branch of the *banco* I shall make my deposit at... dwelling upon new and exciting places to hang our laundry to dry and how to prevent the mildew and mold from overtaking clothes that theoretically should still be dry... observing Tico time winding down to a halt during the nocturnal conversations that occur as our community of transients digests over fermented beverages... These are delightful glimpses that describe my first month in Mastatal, yet they barely scratch the surfaces of what really goes on here.

I've had the pleasure of completing many adventures full of joyful duty; to paraphrase our lost brother Dan I am not so sure if I have ever worked so hard at playing before or vice versa. Hiking down the trails along sloping Quebrada contours while watching morpho butterflies flutter-bys, arriving at various mystical bodies of water at the bottom of the trails to frolic while watching Jesus lizards walk on water, returning to main camp via walking kilometers uphill with dead-fallen trees and branches upon our shoulders to implement into The Crib, and giving many thanks to the Gods

of Army Ants for not laying their wrath upon me as I had unknowingly been carrying their casa madera and ultimately evicted them for our own human purposes.

Taking a break from the construction to avoid being drowned observing the mini-waterfalls developing around the buildings during the downpours, and later practicing my perma-cult beliefs by swaling the surrounding landscape in order to form a holy union of static forms and dynamic forces. Teaming up with neighbors and going out to deliver to our local road some much needed TLC in the form of drainage trenches and gravel to fix the gulleys and clay slip-n-slides forming from the rainfalls so that the bus from Puriscal can still somehow safely navigate its way through the jungle to our community successfully. Attempting to remember more stories to share with y'all as I drool over the yeasty aromas of bread and bagels baking in the cob oven... In other news items that I have gathered through our daily morning meetings, there are many more adventures that I wish I had enough time to be a part of. Harvesting palm fronds and thatching a structure over by the public school. Rescaping and replanting the herb garden. Woodworking projects that are creating shelving and tables for the Hankey and the NEW! kitchen. Completing the final wattling and daubing of the classroom with the gorgeous textures of cow poo. Stealthily transplanting our plant friends to their new homes for beautiful erosion control purposes. Going on collection runs for more cow poo as well as sawdust for our own poo. Organizing and throwing a castration party for the region's procreatable pets. Crafting soaps that even us dirty hippies would love to use on a regular basis. The list goes on and on...

Wait, is this article supposed to be about volunteer GOSSIP!? The evil that breaks down loving communities into telenovellas? I cannot allow myself to be an agent of such destruction, but maybe I can share a little about myself as a compromise. I found myself working in Guanacaste on a natural building project when I came here for a visit to see established natural building projects in the tropics, and before long I found myself proudly representing for the Mastatal mob. Over the past couple of years I've seen a lot of natural building projects, both good and bad designs/builds, and am happy to report that the infrastructure process here is a project that I am excited to have my fingerprints on! Amazing to see what has gone on here in only a few short years. I realize how small this world really is when I discover traces and hear stories of several friends that I have made at Yestermorrow and other places right here at Mastatal as teachers, students and volunteers before my own time here. I can only ponder on whom else that I am connected with that may someday scout their way through the rainforest and stumble upon this unique oasis.

Speaking of the buses to Puriscal earlier, I would like to share a story about our good friend the Lorax. Now most of you are likely familiar with Mr. Lorax from his allegedly fictional biography written by Dr. Seuss but I would like to point out that he actually does exist; not in physical form but rather as a spirit free of boundaries. Lately I have been running into our good friend who speaks for the trees whenever I take the bus to and from Puriscal. He has a habit of getting on board as I am getting off with everyone else in order to push the bus through the newest gully or landslide that has appeared along the two-hour journey on the remote dirt roads that connects our rural community to paved civilization. When we finally reboard a little muddier than we started and continue along our way, I find myself sitting down next to the ethereal Lorax and prepare myself for hearing his paradigm-shifting lessons as the bus resumes conquering the usual bumps of the road.

I start to observe the countryside that rises out of the early morning mists in detail as he points out the deforested pastures with exposed soils created by roaming cattle and eroding *lluvias*. He speaks of how these lands were all once naturally forested and how the red-orangey clay soils were mostly hidden below the organic cycles of composting detritus and growing roots. He then shakes me from our astral time travel straight back into the present reality that I am seeing and directs my attention the hills towering above us that are being over-saturated by *las lluvias* and how the forests are no longer around to breath out the moisture as Gaia's lungs. His lecture about how the hills are becoming semi-liquid through cycles of hydrology and organic matter becoming interrupted are apparent as we pass by a small landslide.

On our return journey in the afternoon, his message becomes even more critical as we come to the same landslide and find that it has grown bigger over the course of the day to the point where it has completely covered and messed up the road after only a light drizzle. And to think that this is only the most immediate effect that deforestation has upon me, only one of the thousands of functions that the trees share in a symbiotic relationship with Gaia. Being thankful that I was not there when the earth decided to settle down to new digs and that the bus was somehow able to still return to the forested lands of Mastatal, I have no choice but to share my education in hopes that you too will someday will recognize and help to regenerate the lost cycles of the diverse ecosystems that revolve around our ever-giving Truffala friends.

So yeah, back to the original question of *que ondas?* With all of this leisurely work, all of this loving community, all of this fantabulous food, all of these trees, the buses still running, and all of the Tico time in the world to come up with this newsletter entry, I can only reply with one answer:

Todo tuanis!

Amorin/Orion/Mello

Comida Corner: Banana Bran Muffins

Here's a quick and easy one that recently found its way into our afternoon snack rotation.

Makes 12 muffins

Ingredients:

- 2 eggs
- ½ cup water
- 1-cup buttermilk
- 1/3-cup oil
- ¾ cup molasses
- ¾ cup all purpose white flour
- ¾ cup whole-wheat flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- 1½-cup bran



Sounding the conch for dinner is a tradition at Rancho Mastatal

- ¾ cup coarsely chopped walnuts
- 2/3-cup raisins
- 1 large, 2 medium pureed bananas

Process:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees
2. Grease or butter muffin trays in the cups and on the surface.
3. Mix eggs, milk, oil, molasses, and water together in large bowl. Whisk slowly until blended.
4. In another bowl, mix together the flours, baking soda, salt, bran, nuts and raisins
5. Make a well in the center of the dry bowl, slowly add the wet ingredients and pureed bananas. Do not over mix. Let all ingredients sit for 15 minutes to allow for maximum absorption.
6. Using a large spoon or ice cream scooper, scoop muffin mix into each of the cups, filling just to the brim. Cook for 30-40 minutes, or until muffin top is firm and spongy.

Buen provecho!

F?tbol Follies: Galore in La Gloria

The first of May marks both the Tico Labor Day as well as the unofficial end of summer in Costa Rica. With this comes another annual tradition, that of the *Fiestas de La Gloria*, a four-day extravaganza in honor of some religious figure. While many of the activities revolve around bible toting and Christian rock, it is the dancing and *f?tbol* that truly attract the crowds. Here we are most concerned with the latter, and thus dedicate the following to its passing.

Though other games were being held simultaneously in the bajos of La Vasconia, where the pitch actually remains flat and well cut from endline to endline, the higher ups of Los Gal?cticos still had their eyes set on the tournament in La Gloria. Therein lied the possibility of winning new uniforms, an exciting prospect despite the relative youth of the gold and black. Such was the impetus last year as well, when Mastatal eventually lost on a coin toss in the pouring rain after no victor could be determined by penalty kicks. Indeed, "*penales*" are the defining characteristic of the day, as most games result in a draw after the short 30 minutes of regulation. A few bodies were spotted on the Mastatal pitch over the course of the week leading up to the tournament practicing the nerve-rattling shot, though practice and game time are entirely different settings. That being said, it can go anyone's way in La Gloria, and Los Gal?cticos were hoping luck might find them on that first Sunday of *invierno*.

Despite all the hype throughout the week, the back of the red truck was looking awfully light on Sunday morning. With ALEX out of town and others reeling from the previous night's dance, it was unclear as to whether we'd even field a full squad. Of course, that didn't stop us from making the trip. We arrived early, signed up, and were scheduled to play in the second match of the day against *Los Hermanos de San Gabriel*. As expected, we were looking a man short, even with JUAN LUIS and VINICIO suiting up, and so CARACA set out on a scavenger hunt for another player, eventually finding one in a talented yet tiny youth from San Miguel named RUDY. His even younger brother threw on a jersey as well just for kicks, and thus Los Gal?cticos were eligible, albeit a bit sporadic.

Mastatal more or less controlled much of the first game, missing a few good opportunities up front

and holding steady in the back with the gringo defense of NIC, TIMO y TYLER. Yet after the back-to-back 15-minute halves it was a 0-0 draw, sending us to the aforementioned shootout. JUNIOR stepped up first and laid a relatively softly struck ball into the goalies gut. Luckily his counterpart missed high over the crossbar. Next up, last minute acquisition RUDY earned his keep with a nice shot into the back of the net. BRUJITA struck the left post with a solid ball, which rolled back alongside the goaline but never crossed over. MARCOS both scored and saved one, and with CARACA's goal it was all tied after five. No outcome was achieved after two more rounds, and so the match was decided on the dreaded coin toss, which this time fell in favor of the Galácticos. Somewhat not in the spirit of the game, but we were on to the second round nevertheless.

Three hours, two downpours and several meatsticks later, the Mastatal boys were back on the field, this time against the hard- striking squad of Tulín, led by none other than "Gordo." While it took a few minutes to regain a proper energy level, the Galácticos soon found their momentum, denying several corner kicks on the defensive end and pushing the ball up front to Caraca and Junior. These two both had clear paths to the goal in the second half, yet were aptly met by the high-flying "Chino" tending Tulin's goal. The excitement grew late in the game, when a hard tackle outside the box led to a unlucky handball in the box and a regulation penalty for Tulín. Minutes later, Mastatal had their own free kick from just outside the box. Caraca sized it up and sent a beautiful blast towards the upper corner – "al puro angulo" – which was amazingly denied by the right hand of Chino, whose acrobatics were worthy enough on their own of the victory.

Considering the circumstances, Los Galácticos should be proud of their performance in La Gloria this year. Depending on the luck of the draw, the steadiness of nerves during penalties and at times the odds of a coin flip, any given team could make it through to the final. Yet with over a dozen teams participating and only one pitch, the all-day affair can be a bit draining, save for plenty of people watching and "Cristo Vive" on the electric guitar.

* * *

The final rainfall tally for the month of May came out at 24 inches, which we can only assume is some sort of record for this early in the season. Yet despite the wetness, the will of the people resulted in various other fútbol outings, including a long-awaited matchup with the newly formed "equipazo" of La Fila. Also known as "Los Austriacos," after its founders, the red shirts consist of a select crew from San Miguel, Zapaton and La Fila, and in over half a dozen outings had yet to lose a match. The scheduled friendly with Los Galacticos was held on the San Miguel pitch on a Saturday afternoon, the same day of the annual Spay/Neuter Clinic, and the weather seemed to cooperate for the most part, despite the late kickoff. Mastatal hit the field with CARACA in net and NIC and BRUJITA manning up central defense. With ALEX healthy, and a little help from our old friend MAURICIN, the Galáctico midfield provided a strong performance, turning the ball around and getting it up front to JUNIOR and TIMO. La Fila came armed with a bruiser squad of behemoths and brutes, yet it was touch, ball movement and "ganas" that decided the game. After an early goal from the red jerseys, Mastatal came back with a vengeance and created numerous opportunities in front of the opponent's net, resulting in three goals before halftime, one of which was called back on account of offsides.

Los Galácticos resumed the second half a little lost, finding the ball in the defensive end for the most part, but with some stellar defense and a new focus up front, they managed a third goal. Having reestablished a stronghold on the match, Mastatal closed in for another, when a JUNIOR cross was intercepted by the goalkeeper at nearly the height of the crossbar, from where he then fell directly on his back, hitting his head hard in the process. After a significant delay, it became clear that the game would end here out of concern for Juani's safety. He was helped off the field and the amistoso was over. (Luckily, no major injuries resulted). And so unofficial as it may have been, the Galáctico victory injected the young squad with a shot of pride and confidence unseen in recent months.

Meanwhile, on the Mastatal pitch, the women were having their own friendly match, ticos vs. gringas, which has seemingly not happened in years. Comprised largely of UW students, ROBIN, and Stonewall SUSAN in defense, the gringa squad set out to an early lead and never looked back, with SADIE scoring a hat trick to seal the victory. Though somewhat taken aback by the day's outcome, KATTIA and all the ticas were grateful for having the opportunity to play together again, reminiscing of the days of old and the more frequent lady events.

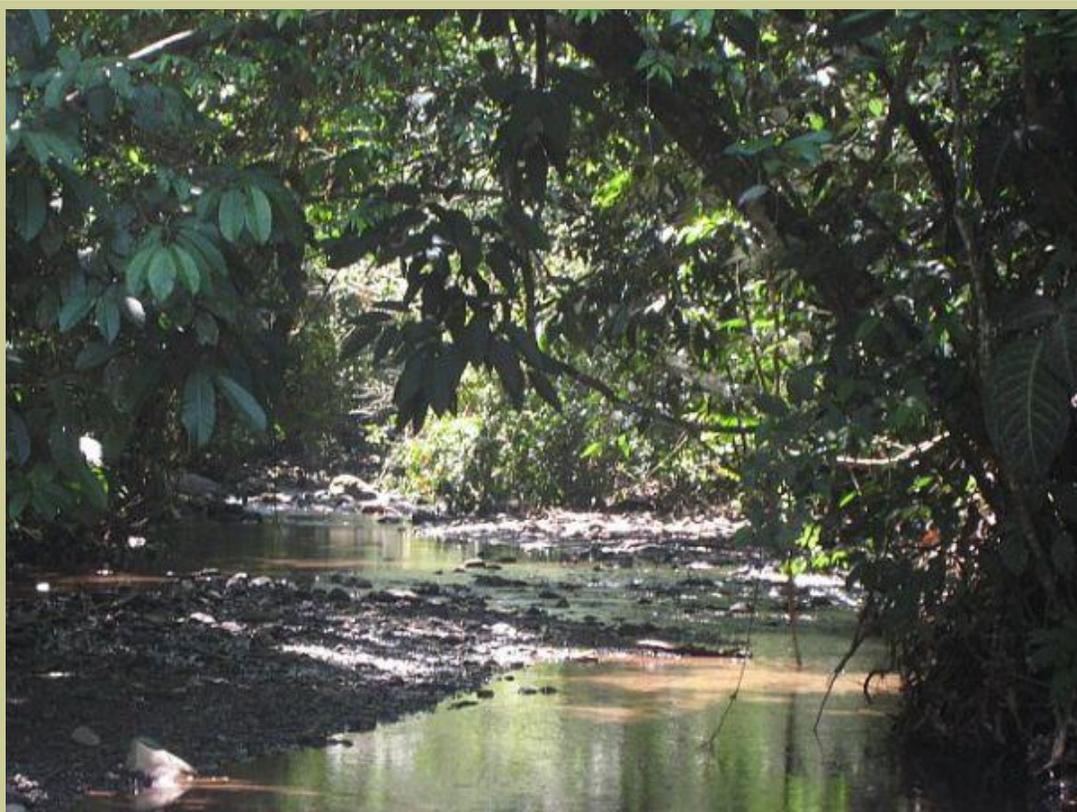
On the following day, Los Galácticos traveled to San Vicente for a poorly organized (surprise, surprise) fest with four other teams. Given the performance against La Fila, they should probably have remained at home and enjoyed a nice Sunday. Oh well, all for the love of the game.

At the time of writing, a surge of interest in the indoor "papi futbol" scene was emerging among the youth of Mastatal, gathering almost daily in the Salon Comunal for some 4-v-4 or 5-v-5. The action is fast and fierce, but the fun is indescribable. For a town whose youth struggle for positive social, communal and recreational activity, papi futbol seems to be one answer. And if we could ever get the basketball clinic going we'd be churning out athletes left and right. Yet talks are ongoing among Asociacion members as to whether play should continue to be allowed in the Salon. Perhaps details of this debate will be revealed in future editions of the follies, but let's hope that the kids don't lose out on a wonderful rainy season opportunity.

With that in mind, it just so happens that yours truly must sign off from the follies for a while. The time has come again to hit the road, in search of what I'm not certain, and thus must leave my post here at the Ranch Newsletter Company. It's been a good long run, and I will most definitely miss these little reports as much as I'll miss the game itself. Yet my playing and writings days are far from over, and my love of futbol is grows bigger everyday. I wish you all the best in your own encounters with the most beautiful game in the world, and hope to be reading up on the Mastatal follies in the months and years to come. Y vamos al futbol....

Golazos,

Tyler a.k.a. Brujita Galacticos #20



A calm pool on the Quebrada Grande river

photo by Amanda Caudill

Inspirational Impressions: Sewage

"Anyone starting out from scratch to plan a civilization would hardly have designed such a monster as our collective sewage system. Its existence gives additional point to the sometimes asked question, *Is there any evidence of intelligent life on the planet Earth?*"

--- G.R. Stewart

"If I urinated into a pitcher of drinking water and then proceeded to quench my thirst from the pitcher, I would undoubtedly be considered crazy. If I invented an expensive technology to put my urine and feces into my drinking water, and then invented another expensive (and undependable) technology to make the same water fit to drink, I might be thought even crazier. It is not inconceivable that some psychiatrist would ask me knowingly why I wanted to mess up my drinking water in the first place."

--- Wendell Berry

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew