

Rancho Mastatal Updates

December 2004

Happy Belated New Year to everyone and apologies for the ultra tardy update. December was the relatively quiet month that we needed to prepare for the New Year onslaught. We rang in 2005 with a little guaro and lots of friends and spent the first day of the year soaking in the nearby hot springs and trekking down the Río Negro. A blissful way to kick off what promises to be yet another incredible year here in Mastatal. DAVE MCEVOY's Aerie Wilderness First Responder Certification Course was the first on the new calendar and followed close on its heels by our third



Bouganvillia — photo by Darrel DeBoer

Yestermorrow Design/Build Course. You can find more information about both of these awesome events below. Seeing SKIP, LIZABETH, DAVE, ANDREA, ANNA, and MARÍA again not only makes our hearts sing; it is testimony to the community here that continues to grow and strengthen with each day that passes. We are genuinely blown away by the number of repeat visitors that we see come through our doors each month. Just in the last few weeks we have had back ART BRIDENSTINE, the father of CATE, one of our former star high school students, LISA HERSHEY, Robin's sister JILL, SUSAN, Tim's cousin BONNIE, CASEY BERKEBILE, RACHEL KENNEDY, HAROLD and MIRIAM PIERCE, JC and of course ROGER. Moreover, many of these folks are slowly introducing their loved ones and friends to the beauty of Mastatal. Recently we met HECTOR, Lisa's dynamic and inspirational friend from VT; JOEL, Susan's very cool and kind partner; MATT, Bonnie's incredible boyfriend; PHIL, Rachel's wonderful fiancé (they got engaged at the waterfall on their recent trip); ARIELLE, Harold's beautiful and talented lady; NATALIE, Miriam's close companion from CO; and HILLARY, JC's gentle and caring friend from WI. In addition to these folks, we made a host of new friends with the other people that recently visited the Ranch and Mastatal for the first time. We expect to see many of these new faces back in future months and years. Thanks to everyone out there for helping spread the word about our projects. With all of the word of mouth publicity that we enjoy, besides our website, we do almost no additional marketing, which is good for a project without the conveniences of phones and the Internet. Lots of love to everyone. Get some turns in for us over the next few months and enjoy the cold and snow.

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RM Program News: WFR Course Highlights

DAVE MCEVOY and FERNANDO GIACCAGLIA recently taught a Wilderness First Responder Certification Course organized by Aerie School for Backcountry Medicine and Rancho Mastatal. This was the second consecutive year that we worked together to offer this magnificent class. It is truly one of our favorite events of the year. We're hopeful that this will become one of the mainstays of RM's Events Calendar for many years to come. Dave was joined by his wonderful family, wife ANDREA and their 2 beautiful daughters, ANNA and MARÍA, who during their stays in Mastatal fully immerse themselves into the community and its activities. Andrea has been working to build relationships with local educators in an effort to assemble a student exchange program with high schools in Missoula, MT. Anna and María have made countless friends here in town. This course and everything related to it are absolutely awesome. The combination of the area's beauty and the Aerie instructors' teaching skills and experience makes this amazing, well-run and educational course tough to beat for educators and backcountry enthusiasts seeking out a truly life-changing experience while getting certified to provide medical assistance in remote areas. A special thanks to JESSICA BRUINSMA, KATIE QUERNA, HAROLD PIETSCHMANN, DAVE CRITTON, STEVE HESTER, CONOR BLACK, RYAN TOOHEY, ANDY BOOKTER, ROBERT FLETCHER, JUSTIN SHURR, and JOHANNA NELSON, a fabulous group of dedicated and interesting students that made this course an immense pleasure to host. They all worked diligently during the 10-day course, all succeeding in attaining their certification. We added 2 free days to the curriculum this year during which time students climbed La Cangreja, visited the hot springs, and hiked the area's forests. For the course's grand finale, Dave and his staff, with the help of ROGER, JUNIOR, BRENDA KELLY of Coast to Coast Adventures, SEAN HARRIS, TIMO and ART, simulated a plane crash along the Río Negro that the soon-to-be WFRs had to respond to. Junior, the drunken pilot responsible for the rough landing, was spot on with his acting. We're presently working on his portfolio for his upcoming trip to Hollywood. Thanks to everyone else who helped make our first group visit of the year a success.

Conservation Update: Garbage

One issue that we have attempted to address during our 3-year stint in Mastatal is garbage reduction and disposal. There is no formal garbage collection service for Mastatal offered by the Municipality of Puriscal. Most of the trash that is generated in the area is either burned or buried, neither good options for the environment or the health of Mastatal's residents. As this region grows in the coming years, the responsible conservation of the visual beauty of our community and its surrounding forests will become a real challenge. Our policy since founding Rancho Mastatal has been to limit the amount of garbage that we produce as a result of our activities. We do this by buying locally and in bulk, composting all human and kitchen waste and paper products, using our own cloth bags when purchasing goods to be brought back to the Ranch from outside our area, reusing plastic bags and other containers, burying broken and unrecyclable glass in the foundations of our buildings, amongst other practices. Given the nature of our activities, we do invariably generate garbage. We haul out the rubbish that we produce so that it can be taken to a proper waste disposal site outside of San José. In addition to our own refuse, we have also agreed with the

community to transport out some of the local garbage. Transporting garbage to a another community though is not a sustainable solution making the implementation of a solid, long-term, and local program all that much more essential. We cannot allow what happened outside of Orotina to happen here. A large open dump next to one of our pristine rivers is simply not an option. With volunteers, students and other visitors, we have organized a number of trash cleanups and small garbage reduction campaigns in the elementary school in an attempt to reduce the garbage found on the streets in Mastatal. The younger kids seem particularly open to the idea of a litter-free town. We have asked the Pulpería to review the types of products that they sell, particularly small bags of chips, the plastic bags of which are one of the main culprits of the garbage equation. But as long as kids and others are buying these products, it's evident that the Pulpería will continue to sell them, at least until there is a better alternative. Throwaway bottles have also become more common even though buyers can opt to purchase most of their drinks in reusable and returnable containers. As the world becomes more taken in by consumerism, our work will become more complex. Third world countries like many in Central America simply are not prepared and do not have the finances to deal with the ravages of garbage that are starting to dominate their countryside roads and urban streets. Governments are woefully underfunded and garbage collection and recycling programs are generally not given any priority with so many other social, health and environmental problems plaguing these countries. Plastic bottles in particular have played an important role in this tragedy. But without readily accessible potable water, what are the choices, especially for tourists? What an irony that many spectacularly beautiful areas throughout Mexico and Central America are being overrun and ruined touristically partly by the very people that come to experience their beauty. Mastatal is still a small, tranquil, relatively clean, rural community in the foothills of La Cangreja Mountains and water in our area is some of the cleanest anywhere. Now is the time to develop and implement a responsible garbage policy in Mastatal with waste reduction being its number one priority. Developing a strategy any later than soon will result in a much more problematic challenge down the road. One of our hopes locally is to encourage someone to open up a shop that sells homemade breads and common products such as rice, beans, and laundry detergent in bulk. We think the future library/community building could be home to innovative businesses such as this. Without the help of the municipality, these are issues that we must confront as a community. It may begin by teaching and promoting a sense of responsibility within community members that will someday be commonplace. It is possible to argue that garbage collection is the responsibility of our local governments, but it is harder to argue that the decision to generate garbage is not our own. Therefore reducing the amount of waste that we produce is first and foremost our responsibility and an act that would help our local governments, our environment, and the health of all of the residents of Mastatal.

Building Report: Yestermorrow Natural Design/Build Recap

Wow!! What an amazing course! Our third in 3 years with Yestermorrow Design/Build School. SKIP DEWHIRST and LIZABETH MONIZ teamed up once again with an incredible group of enthusiastic natural building students to design and erect the greater part of a new structure situated at the old camping area and future house site and looking out towards the La Cangreja National Park. The group of diversely talented college students, architects, small business owners, residential builders and aspiring green building professionals decided to tackle the difficult task of choosing a site for, drawing up plans of, and constructing a shower and composting toilet under the same roof. The materials palette included cob (sand, straw and clay mixed together), bamboo (2 species),

waddle and daub (bamboo frame covered with cob), wood and concrete. The students, NICK LEDOUX, GWEN POKALO, JOANNE GARTON, PETE HAAG, BRIAN PERLOW, DANA FANTAUZZO, BRET MUELLER, EMILY KIMLER, ERIN MCKEON, JOSEPH PAGLINAWAN, PENNY SUNN, ERIC DAHLSTRAND, JULIA JACK-SCOTT and HELEN HONG brought together brains, brawn and boundless energy to bang out an amazing amount of work during their short stay at the Ranch. Fortunately for us, NICK, JOSEPH, ERIC and JULIA all elected to stay on to see the project through to the end. It promises to be both beautiful and practical when finished. The shower/composting toilet will be joined by Tim and Robin's house in the coming year. We hope to break ground on this in the coming weeks. We want to express our sincere gratitude to all of the folks at Yestermorrow who have supported our projects here in Costa Rica over the years, and in particular to Skip and Lizabeth whose visit we look so forward to every year. We will do our best to send out photos of the completed structure in the coming weeks and hope to have dates for the 2006 workshop in place soon.

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Máximo Gato

We would like to take this opportunity to make a brief announcement about the most recent addition to the growing Mastatal family. MÁXIMO GATO, unanimously named by a group of strict, caring, and demanding professionals, joined our ranks towards the end of the year. Since arriving to the Ranch, he has become the hungriest and most energized member of the crew, that is at least during the 2 ½ hours that he's awake each day. Regardless of the time of day, he's by far the cutest thing hanging around the Ranch these days. Doesn't say much about the rest of us here at the moment. This miniature male feline was taken in by the Ranch to assure a proper upbringing and safe surroundings. Cu was at first a bit put off by the little rugrat and would greet Máximo with a swat to the head or a hiss that sent the kitten cowering into a corner. Since then though, they have grown accustomed to one another, share bowls, and at times even play together. Máximo has been honing his hunting skills on the plethora of cicadas that reside in Mastatal during the summer months. Mangey's not all that happy that Máximo's attempting to worm his in on her cicada chomping monopoly. Nor is SEAN who seems to have had his nickname swindled. Así es la vida aquí en Mastatal. With all of this said, we're expecting a smooth transition from feral to domesticated and trust that Máximo will be part of the Ranch's growing family unit for years to come.

Community Facts/Stories: Professional Musicians Play Mastatal

The communities of Mastatal, Zapatón, San Miguel, San Vicente and La Fila de Aguacate received a special gift during this past holiday season when it received a visit from a number of professional musicians with ties to CO. My cousin, BONNIE DRAIN, a soprano, and her friends LINDA SHEA, clarinetist, CAREY HARWOOD, guitarist, GERARD MORRIS, euphonium player and BENJAMIN GREENBERG, horn player, arrived to Mastatal with instruments wedged into the holding area of the bus to put on a free concert for the local people. The turnout was tremendous with an estimated 70 or more locals attending, plus a crew from the Ranch. Concert highlights included Ave María, sung by Bonnie and the favorite of many local women, and All That Jazz, an ensemble performed by the whole group. Other high points of the afternoon included the Merry Band of Energized Bladder Filled Dogs trying to steal the show with their periphery performance of tailchasing and flower arrangement pissing on. Fortunately, this sideshow didn't take away from the magnificence of the early evening and succeeded in providing a few laughs, albeit muffled ones. We also learned what the hell a euphonium was! Thanks Gerard. Many locals approached the

musicians after the concert to express their sincere delight with this opportunity to view and participate in an event that most would never have otherwise had a chance to see. We are hopeful that we can do this again next year and will be looking for monies to help finance a similar event that was this year funded entirely out of the pockets of the musicians themselves. Thanks everyone!!

Comida Corner: Smoky Green Split Pea Soup with Sage and Roasted Garlic

Another Rebar Cookbook winner, this soup is delicious even without the ham bone and it's a snap to put together. This is the perfect soup for those of you up North fighting the cold! Even here where it is summer and the sun is shining, we still love to eat it and boy do we sweat! Serves 8-10.

2 cups green split peas, soaked overnight 8 cups vegetable stock 1 large yellow onion, diced 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil 4 bay leaves ¼ tsp red chile flakes 2 tsp. salt 2 carrots, finely diced 3 celery sticks, finely diced 2 garlic cloves, minced ½ cup minced sage 2 garlic bulbs, roasted (see recipe below) 1 tsp cracked pepper ¾ tsp. liquid smoke (we substitute a grated smoked cheese) 1 tsp chipotle puree (found in small cans in the ethnic section of supermarkets, and well worth the time to find as it imparts such a wonderful flavor)

Whole roasted garlic 2 garlic bulbs 2 tsp olive oil pinch of salt pinch of cracked pepper

1. Pre-heat oven (or toaster oven) to 400 degrees. Using a sharp knife, slice the top off the garlic bulb, just enough to expose the tops of the garlic flesh. Center each bulb on a square piece of aluminum foil. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Wrap the bulbs securely and pop them into the oven.
2. After 45 minutes you should start to smell the sweet roasting aroma, but depending on the size of your bulb, it may need a bit more time. Test by slipping the sharp point of a paring knife into one of the cloves. If it slides in effortlessly, or the bulbs are starting to poke out of their skins, then the garlic is ready to serve. (You can make more than this and keep it in the fridge for making salad dressings or just spreading on your favorite bread).

Soup 1. Heat the stock and keep it warm while you prepare the soup. Drain the peas and rinse well in cold water. Heat oil in a large soup pot and sauté onion until translucent. Add bay leaves, half the sage, chile flakes, salt, carrots, celery and minced garlic. Stir and sauté for 10 minutes. Add the green split peas and warm stock. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer until the peas are soft and falling apart. Remove the bay leaves.

2. Squeeze the flesh from the roasted garlic bulbs and add it to the soup pot with the remaining sage, black pepper, liquid smoke (or smoked cheese) and chipotle puree. With a hand blender or food processor, puree the soup until smooth, adding more stock if it's too thick. Before serving, reheat the soup gently and season to taste with more chipotles, pepper or salt.

Serve with homemade garlic croutons! 5 slices bread, cubed ½ x ½ 3 Tbsp olive oil 3 garlic cloves, minced ¼ tsp. salt

Toss bread cubes with oil, garlic, and salt. Spread out on a lined baking sheet and bake in the oven at 350 degrees for 8-10 minutes, or until evenly browned and crisp on the outside. This can be done at the same time you are roasting your garlic!

Happy Cookin' and Buen Provecho!

Inspirational Impressions: Anyway

“Do not let the fact that things are not made for you, that conditions are not as they should be, stop you. Go on anyway. Everything depends on those who go on anyway”.

- Robert Henri

Thanks for that Dave.

Abrazos,

Tim and Robin