

Rancho Mastatal Updates

October 2004

I must admit that I had trouble getting out of bed on November 3. Over the past few weeks, I have taken walks in the woods that have allowed me to begin the healing. The time has come again to teach, sweat and move forward. There is an immense amount of work ahead that needs to be tackled with optimism, creativity, ingenuity and awareness. May we all engage in good works to bring about happiness to those less fortunate, revive our ailing environment, and learn to bring peace to our troubled country and world. And may good judgment and sympathy drive our decisions, and the divine spirits be with us in the coming years.



Robin has total mastery of the earthen oven

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RM Program News: 2005

2005 is approaching quickly. This means, amongst other things, that the busy season is almost upon us. It should be our most demanding year since we opened our doors at the end of 2001. The calendar for 2005 will be highlighted by our first Permaculture/Yoga Course in June, organized by Jenny Pell and Chris Shanks. We are also looking forward to repeat programs with the University of Washington, Seattle University, Aerie School for Backcountry Medicine, Yestermorrow Design/Build School, Solar Energy International and Tropical Adventures in Education. Moreover we are working to organize our first cob workshop in December 2005. More surprises and announcements are sure to be forthcoming throughout the year. For more information about our 2005 calendar, please see our website at [Events Calendar](#). If you or anyone you know is interested in organizing a group trip to or workshop in Mastatal, please send them our way.

Conservation Update: Under Attack

Wild spaces are under attack around the world. As the world population grows, consumer habits

become more voracious, and more and more people lose touch with our forests, rivers, oceans, prairies, mountains, deserts, coastlines and mangroves, the prospect of losing these habitats is undeniable. So, before doing anything else today, step outside and take a deep breath. Take a short walk in the woods. Bring your child to the beach. Plant a native tree in your front yard. Plan a camping trip with your family. Turn off the television. Recommend an inspirational book to a friend. Prepare a meal with all local ingredients. Call your congressman or congresswoman and tell them that you give a shit about water quality. Design a composting toilet for your house. Turn down your thermostat 2 degrees and put on a sweater. Give to an environmental non-profit. Read a book to your daughter. Learn about the harmful effects of making concrete and pressure treating wood. Price out a hybrid vehicle. Turn off a light. Let the dandelions thrive in your yard. Make a gift for your nephew instead of buying it. Learn how to make natural soap with your grandchild. Vow to never eat fast food again. Turn off your cell phone. Walk to work. And then, do something similar tomorrow. And the next day. And then the next.

Building Report: The Shaggin' Cabin

We are optimistic that 2005 will mark the year that we finally built ourselves a little bungalow. Robin and I have been living in the main house for over 3 years now, amongst the hustle and bustle that characterizes everyday life at the Ranch. We are eager for a little privacy and are beginning to understand its importance to the overall health of the Ranch, ourselves and our activities. We hope that by the end of next year, and hopefully sooner, we will have a small cabin towards the back of the current camping area in which to spend to some "quiet" time, while we ponder building a more permanent home for ourselves and visiting friends and family. We have not yet decided on the materials palette, though are considering a combination of local teak and tropical cedar, bamboo and cob. Robin has been designing away and her drawings are starting to take form. We are working to recruit the help of a few friends to lend a hand us with the construction and we hope to break ground soon after the New Year. Please come and join us if you are interested. It promises to be quite the merrymaking.

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Making a Difference in 2 Weeks

The following article appeared in the Vancouver Sun newspaper on October 30. "Only if you think it will be worth it," said my skeptical father when I announced I wanted to spend part of August volunteering in a tiny village in Costa Rica.

I wanted to join the burgeoning number of young people who are choosing to spend their school holidays participating in international development projects in remote countries. I signed up with Education Adventures, a Toronto-based company, and made a deal with my parents: I would work to pay for half my expenses, and they would match me. But as departure date, Aug. 18, grew nearer, I found myself wondering: How much of a real contribution can I, or anyone, make in the developing world in just 12 days? Can two weeks really make a difference?

Our group of seven high school students and two chaperone/ teachers arrived at San Jose airport in what one student described as "euphoric shock." On the 2 1/2-hour drive south to Rancho Mastatal, on the outskirts of Mastatal, I stared out the van window at hills that seemed to be bleeding a deep red soil that I wanted to cup in my hands.

I woke up at 6:30 a.m. with a drink of tart, freshly squeezed orange juice. Every day, we had a new

goal: some sort of community project or educational excursion. The first morning, National Park Day, we toured the La Cangreja National Park with local schoolchildren. I spent the hike trying out my Spanish on some curious 10-year-olds, continually pointing at things and asking, "Como se dice?" to find out how to say waterfall or mud in their language. When a boy, Andrés, asked me about the weather in Canada, it was hard to explain the meaning of snow, since they have no concept of it. August is part of Costa Rica's winter season, which consists of the same temperature as the rest of the year -- about 25 degrees -- but rain and thunderstorms each day.

I loved the excitement of "truenas" y "relámpagos" -- thunder and lightning. After playing soccer with the local girls' team, I got caught in a storm on my five-kilometer walk back to the farm where we ate and slept. This hard rain, the result of the growing deforestation in the country, erodes the soil enough to damage newly planted trees and contaminate waterways.

Later, as I helped students from the "Ecoturismo y Agricultura" (Eco-tourism and Agriculture) class at La Gloria High School to plant endangered tree species, I pressed the fragile roots of a "cedro dulce" tree into a small hole and prayed it would survive.

An even messier project than tree-planting was making a "cob floor" for a farm shed. Traditionally used in rural Britain, cob flooring consists of clay, sand and cow patties. It was tiring but fun to stomp the fibrous, gritty, wet muck and smack the finished product on to the floor.

On the seventh day, I stayed with a local family to experience the true rural Costa Rican way of life. The mother, Maritza, was a humble middle-aged woman and I felt guilty telling her I couldn't eat all the food she put on my plate. I stared at the mountain of rice, beans and chicken in front of me, and after eating all that I could, I still managed to have a bit more out of politeness. (Rice and beans is one of the customary Costa Rican dishes and it is rich in flavor and protein.) Maritza's youngest daughter, Yeulin, nine years old, was delighted when I gave her a mini deck of cards and, though she attempted to explain some card games, I had to fake understanding when the language barrier became too frustrating.

Falling asleep at night, I always heard a cacophony of noise: the bellowing of baritone frogs, shrill and fluctuating cries of unknown jungle animals, and the rattling hum of cicadas.

Rancho Mastatal was very well integrated with the village community, and that made my volunteering worthwhile. I never felt I was intruding on the daily life of the people and merely giving money, but rather that I was working alongside the community to take part in things that needed doing. Besides the community projects, which included sanding the elementary school walls and organizing a garbage clean-up, my group also took part in the culture of the village -- taking Spanish classes, going to a bingo fundraiser for the school, and learning to weave baskets with an indigenous Zapatón Indian family.

I discovered that the key part in volunteering is sharing skills and knowledge, and that the local people were just as interested in my country as I was in theirs. Before the trip I had made a collage on Canadian geography with an assortment of photos and cut-outs displaying the variety of our landscapes. We sang O Canada to the school kids and they sang their national anthem to us.

In Costa Rica, I learned that there is not such a big difference in how we all think, how we feel, how we love. So when a friend recently asked me, "Can two weeks make a difference?" I blurted out the reply, "Every two weeks makes a difference!" Because it's those little acts of mutual kindness, of reaching out to others and connecting with their very different lives, that add up to make the world a better and more tolerant place to live.

Robyn Hooper is a Grade 11 student at West Vancouver secondary school.

Community Facts/Stories: Essay Contest

The University of Washington (UW) and Solar Energy International (SEI) are both offering fully paid educational trips to 4 fortunate local community members who submit winning essays during an ongoing contest. The competition is open to anyone over 16 years old residing in Mastatal, Zapatón, San Miguel, San Vicente and La Fila de Aguacate. The winners, who must write about what they could learn by going on one of these trips, will accompany UW and SEI student groups on trips to either the Dúrika Biological Reserve outside of Buenos Aires, Monteverde and the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve, or the Hacienda Barú Biological Wildlife Refuge near Dominical. These "scholarships" will provide 4 talented and lucky locals an opportunity to see another part of their lovely country and learn about the incredible biodiversity that Costa Rica boasts. The victors are expected to give a presentation to the rest of their community upon returning from their trips.

Comida Corner: Apple, Pear, Cranberry Tart

This comes in just in time for the holidays. It is simple and delicious. I thank Jen and Renny Beal, owners of Izabella's Eatery in Bennington, Vermont, for the inspiration for this treat! You will need a tart pan for this recipe, they are available anywhere they sell kitchen items and are well worth it!

Crust: ¼ cup pecans (you can use almonds, if you prefer) ½ cup sugar (I recommend a natural, granulated brown sugar) 1 ½ cups unbleached flour ½ tsp vanilla 1 ¼ cup unsalted butter, melted, then cooled (put it in the freezer for 5 or 10 minutes)

Filling: 1 tart apple, cut into chunks or slices 2 pears, cut into chunks or slices 1 handful of dried cranberries ½ cup sugar (again I recommend the natural, granulated brown) 2/3 Tbs corn starch A bit of butter for sautéing the apples and pears A pinch of cinnamon, nutmeg, clove or whatever spices you like

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. 2. Toast the nuts until golden and then grind them up (be careful not to burn them!) 3. Take out a few tablespoons for the filling. 4. Mix all the crust ingredients (I use my hands) and press into tart pan. 5. Sauté apple, pears, cranberries, and spices in butter. Cover for 5 minutes or so. Add the sugar and stir well. When they are done but still firm add the corn starch and mix well. 6. Pour filling into the crust and bake until done. Check it in 35 to 40 minutes to see how it is doing. It can take up to an hour to bake. Be sure to place the tart pan on a cookie sheet so all the juices don't run into the oven.

Let cool and enjoy!

You can also use whatever fruit you have in season, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, substituting maple syrup for sugar, etc! Have fun with this treat! Buen Provecho!

Inspirational Impressions: War and Revolution

"I've been to war. I've raised twins. If I had a choice, I'd rather go to war". -George W. Bush

"To die for the revolution is a one-shot deal; to live for the revolution means taking on the more difficult commitment of changing our day-to-day life patterns". -Frances M. Beal

Abrazos,

Tim and Robin