

# Rancho Mastatal Updates

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## June 2004

*Good wishes from the Ranch and Happy Summer to all of you. June, as most months, was a busy, eventful, and productive time. The University of Washington's semester abroad came to a close, with two super parties, one here at the Ranch, highlighted by phallic mushrooms and black Barbies, and the other, a bit more subdued yet still lively, at the "Salón Comunal" and featuring live "Rancho" music from Puriscal. In June we also had visits from a number of old friends, hosted an incredible group from Seattle University (thanks Brenda and crew!), and made serious headway on a number of our ongoing projects. The "Mangey and Chombo" Show has hit its stride with Mangey in heat and Chombo looking for a ladder to find a way in. We're thinking about asking Vinicio to make one of his trademark footstools to give Chombo a boost so that he can finally boast. Mangey, for those of you that know her, is doing well otherwise, though she can admittedly be an encumbrance at times. She'll need to shape up or Don Mario just may get his wish. July will be another huge month with two groups from the University of Washington due to invade our forests. Until next time, keep a smile on your face and follow your heart*



Wall Niche, in La Choza

photo by David Katz

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## **RM Program News: Permaculture Course in the Works**

We are happy to report that we are in the process of putting together a Permaculture course to be offered at the Ranch in 2005. This would be the first course of its kind in Mastatal. We have been trying to put together the right people and find an appropriate time period to host this course since before our arrival to Costa Rica in November of 2001. I think that we may finally have all of the pieces in place. As of now, we are looking at dates in June.

CHRIS SHANKS, a Permaculture instructor from the US who knows a great deal about tropical flora, recently visited Mastatal. During his stay we took some time to firm up course ideas and talk about potential dates. For those of you unfamiliar with the term, Permaculture might be defined as the conscious design and maintenance of agriculturally productive ecosystems that have the diversity, stability, and resilience of natural ecosystems. It is the harmonious integration of landscape and people providing their food, energy, shelter, and other materials and non-material needs in a sustainable way. We consider our site ideal for a workshop of this nature and are excited about the upcoming event. We'll be sure to keep you abreast of any developments. In the meantime, please help us spread the fledgling word. Those interested in the course can contact us directly at [info@ranchomastatal.com](mailto:info@ranchomastatal.com) for more information.

## **Conservation Update: Conservation vs. Development**

A recent presidential decree allows the cutting down of 15% of coastal virgin forest and 24% of secondary forest on private properties to make way for construction geared towards ecotourism. One can argue that this puts business interests in front of environmental protection. On the flip side, some people contend that by allowing this relatively small percentage of logging on these properties, the remaining forests on these lands will be assured protection. What is more important in the long-run? The conservation of our natural resources or development that creates jobs and drives the economic engine of the country? There are obviously no clear answers to such complicated questions. Nevertheless, here in Mastatal, we believe that we can have our cake and eat it to. We feel that through our efforts to create an example of community sustainability, we will be able to protect our forests while building a financially viable infrastructure. Following is an example of how we are working to bring this about.

Outside "experts" have recently been telling locals that in the very near future, with the increased tourist activity projected in our region, someone in town will be able to build a small successful hotel in the area. This would clearly involve new construction and an enormous amount of capital. What these specialists seem to be overlooking is that nobody currently residing in Mastatal has the means to undertake such a large project. Let's think outside of the box for a moment and imagine another way that an increased lodging demand might be met. Many if not most families in town have an extra bed, an unused room, or some additional space in their homes to accommodate another person. The Ranch, during a number of months during the year, is at full capacity, forcing us at times to turn people away. To take advantage of the situation, we have teamed up with 10 families in Mastatal to offer homestays, or a chance for international visitors to live with and learn from local families.

The early success of this program has been palatable. Some families have been without "vacancy" for almost three months, and all of the participating families have received significant business

from this new "program". This joint venture has translated into an important economic injection for these families. There was no need for these families to invest in new infrastructure or home improvements. They have been able to go about their lives without any drastic changes in lifestyle and have the chance to learn about other cultures through meaningful interaction with their guests while providing a unique and wonderful setting for them; all while earning some extra money for their households! In other words, the infrastructure for handling increased tourist traffic already exists! The money stays here in the community and we are all happier and healthier as a result. Please help us promote homestays so that we can work to preserve our forests while bringing economic opportunities to our community.

### **Building Report: The Hooch Stands**

The Hooch is up baby! On Gus and Emily's last day at the Ranch, we succeeded in raising the basic structure of our newest and most exciting construction since Leo's. There's still an immense amount of work to do, though we are off to a wonderful start. It's going to be an awesome structure. Thanks to everyone that has contributed to the work to date, especially GUS SINSHEIMER, AARON GOMEZ, AARON WESTGATE, EMILY GREEN and ZEBBA FLOYD. Roger, Timo and other building enthusiasts will be picking up where Gus and crew left off to assure that the structure gets completed before the busier months arrive towards the end of the year. Our immediate goal is to get a roof on so that we can have some shade/shelter to work under during the coming months.

### **Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Gus and Em**

We endured one of our most difficult goodbyes to date when we were forced to bid farewell recently to our good friends GUS SINSHEIMER and EMILY GREEN. Gus and Em lived at the Ranch for 6 months and provided the Ranch and the community with seemingly endless quantities of love, humor, inspiration and friendship. Gus headed up the construction of the new passive solar showers at Jeanne's and The Hooch, in addition to working on countless small projects and tasks, and Emily was a pillar in the kitchen while contributing to numerous projects around the Ranch. We plan on seeing them up north in their new home in Maine in October. Until then, they will be in our hearts and minds. Their legacy here in Mastatal is as secure as the mange on Mangey's nose. We love you guys!!!

### **Community Facts/Stories: Local Politics**

Timo was recently elected to participate in the local government as a "vocal". It is still not clear whether Timo can legally hold his new post as a resident but not a citizen. The community is waiting to hear back from the Municipality in Puriscal to verify its legitimacy. There is a real possibility that the new position will be short lived. Nevertheless, in the meantime, Timo will be contributing to local government activities and will be allowed to contribute until we hear otherwise. Timo has joined in on the two government meetings since the election, and has been exposed to the inner workings of the "Asociación de Desarrollo Integral de Mastatal". He admits that the work has been intriguing and sometimes fascinating, while at times being difficult, frustrating, and burdensome. Nevertheless, he sees it as being an important small step in becoming more politically active and in turn having more of a say in how the area develops in the coming years. The government is currently weighed down with a \$5,000 debt, an inheritance from the last administration. The new government's first attempt to climb out from underneath their financial obligation was to organize a lunch for visitors to the recent trail inauguration at La Cangreja National Park. The government succeeded in making close to \$150 from the food sales. This was

considered a positive step forward, albeit a small one, in gaining solvency. The government is also planning a "baile" and soccer games for the weekend of August 14 and 15 and hopes to bring in another \$500 or so during that weekend. We are urging Mother Nature to cooperate.

### **Comida Corner: Lemon Bars**

This recipe has been with me since my Peace Corps days and has had a revival here at the ranch this past month. It is easy, quick and yummy!

Dough: 2 cups of whole wheat flour 1 cup butter, very soft or melted ½ cup powdered sugar (we use "tapa dulce", essentially unprocessed, brown sugar)

Topping: 2 cups sugar (we again use "tapa dulce") 2 eggs 1/3 cup lemon juice 1 tsp baking powder  
3 Tbs whole wheat flour

Combine dough ingredients until thoroughly mixed. Press into medium sized pan. Bake at medium heat for 15-20 minutes.

Combine sugar, flour, baking powder. Add lemon juice. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well. Pour over partially baked crust and bake for 25 min or more.

Again, happy bakin' and buen provecho!

### **Inspirational Impressions: Rich**

"He who knows he has enough is rich" Words from Lao-tzu from the Taoist tradition

OK y'all. Hasta la próxima vez.

Abrazos,

Tim and Robin