

Rancho Mastatal Updates

March 2004

We hope that this finds you all enjoying the warmer days and beautiful spring weather, wherever it is you may be. After the first consistent heavy rains of the year, I feel that we can safely say that we have officially entered into the rainy season. The forest has once again come alive, showcasing an immense collection of greens and beautiful flowers. The dust has disappeared and the early morning hours feature a chorus of new songs and welcome sounds. We are happy to see the lovely rain once again, and are looking forward to the water filled months that lie ahead. Piggybacking the arriving climactic changes is the University of Washington (UW) and their spring semester abroad in Mastatal. The group of UW students and professors will be with us until the beginning of June. We are looking forward to a static, motivated assembly of hungry minds and burgeoning mental power at the Ranch for such a long period of time. And as always, a special thanks to all of those volunteers that make our projects possible.

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RM Program News: The Center High School Returns

After a fruitful and inspirational visit last year, a new group of students and teachers from the The Center High School in Seattle, WA will be returning to Mastatal in early April. José Murphy, a



Slats of bamboo comprise the walkway-porch that connects the front & back porches to the outdoor showers.

photo by David Katz

Spanish teacher at the Seattle Center based high school, will be coming back for the second consecutive year to lead what will most likely be a life changing experience for these 9th, 10th and 11th graders. We're thrilled to see José again. He's an amazing teacher, with an ability to bring out the best in his kids. As a result of a bet with his students, he spoke Spanish 99% of the time that he was in Mastatal last year. His commitment to win the wager frustrated the aspiring Spanish speakers at times, but helped assure that they would be realizing their goal of Spanish immersion and an improved handle on the United State's second most important language. The Center High School students will be joined again by Tom McDonald, the owner of Tropical Adventures in Education, and a frequent visitor to the Ranch. We're very much looking forward to continue fostering our evolving relationship with The Center High School.

Conservation Update: UW Students Arrive for Semester Abroad

Next month also marks the beginning of the University of Washington's semester abroad program in Costa Rica. The students and professors will be spending 7 of their 10 weeks in Mastatal, and during the remaining 3 weeks will be visiting other research and related sites throughout the country including La Selva, Monteverde, Durika, Palo Verde, and Hacienda Barú. Susan Bolton, a hydrology professor in the Forestry Department, is the principle instructor. She will be joined by professor Chuck Henry and graduate student Chris Brummer for part of the course. The semester will be broken down into four parts; Environmental Assessment, Community Assessment, an Introduction to Ecoregions of Costa Rica, and an Independent Study or Service Learning. As part of their learning, the class will be conducting research in and around the Ranch, working with local families in Mastatal, studying the local ecosystem, and designing and building a small, sustainable structure at a yet undetermined site. We are fired up to have this group with us for so long.

Building Report: Cob Baby!

We raised our first cob building in March, a new storage area for linens, sheets, foodstuffs, and more. After having our bedroom double as an office and storeroom for more than two years, we are looking forward to gain some personal space as a result of the new building. Although not the most glamorous application for our first cob structure, it will be an important addition to our infrastructure, and yes, believe me, it is incredibly beautiful to look at and fits in very well with the surroundings. We built most of the cob "bodega" during March's natural building workshop with the Yestermorrow Design/Build School. It was an incredible two weeks of work, each day ending with a bigger structure, sorer muscles, a renewed spirit, and a well deserved ice cold "Imperial" or "Negra", followed of course by an unmatched meal out of the Ranch's enchanted kitchen. The group, albeit small, kicked some serious cob ass. Thanks so much to students KERRY MCMANNIS, TITA SOKOLOFF, DANIEL GREEN, DAVID LEHMANN, PAUL NORIEGA, and ANDREAS STAVROPOULOS, and a mammoth appreciation and recognition to our fearless, loving instructors SKIP DEWHIRST and LIZABETH MONIZ. The little extras on the building are outstanding, including built in shelves, lovely bi-folding doors, and a beautifully decorated back entrance, the hidden gem of this building. We'll be installing the earth floor and applying the natural plaster in the coming months, so if you are interested in dancing in and slinging around some mud, get your sweet ass down here. Aside from being empowering, cob is contagious.

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Evening

The lights are dimmed, the day is done. Chattered conversations quiet, one by one. With the kitchens aroma and our belly sounds, We link our hands and gather round. With this first stillness

since morning's rise, We reflect on the day with gently closed eyes. Thanks again, Mother Earth, for this body I've used, For the colours and sensations, your water and food. Thanks again, Father Time, for another fine day, To deepen my mind through creation and play. And thanks, with love, to my companions all gathered here, Who've inspired and cared and shared with cheer. So with candle soft evening, it's time to relax, Then to starry skies and sleep, under the ever watchful bats!

Paul Irish

Community Facts/Stories: Back to the Fields

Now that the first rains have fallen, farmers are heading back to the fields to plant their first beans, corn and squash of the season. The cooler weather and saturated soils mark the traditional commencement of the planting season in the region. We will be looking forward to the first "elotes" and "frijoles tiernos" in a few short months.

Comida Corner: Burnt Eggplant

This traditional Indian side dish comes from Simply Vegetarian! Edited by Nancy Mair and Susan Rinzler. This is a quick, easy crowd pleaser. We serve it on "Sandwich Night" or accompanied with pita and hummus.

Preparation time: 50-55 minutes How to "burn" eggplant: Cook 5-medium-large eggplants over an open flame by placing it directly on gas burner. Rotate eggplant to char all sides evenly. Eggplant will gradually collapse as flesh becomes soft. After burning, set aside to cool:

Sauté following in large skillet or saucepan over medium-low heat until garlic and onions are transparent:

½ cup butter (or ghee) 2 large cloves garlic, minced, or more, to taste 1 large onion, finely grated (including juice) 1 ½ teaspoons salt or more, to taste ¼ yellow chile, minced (use more for a hotter version)

Spoon cooled insides of eggplants into the sauce and mix well. Bring the mixture to a boil so that the sauce saturates the eggplant.

Happy cooking and buen provecho!

Inspirational Impressions: Hafiz

A Hard Decree

Last Night God Posted On the tavern wall A hard decree for all of love's inmates Which read: If your heart cannot find joyful work The jaws of this world Will probably Grab hold of your Sweet Ass

Hafiz - The Great Sufi Master

Hope to see you all somewhere soon.

Have a great day.

Tim and Robin