

Rancho Mastatal Updates

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February 2004

Robin and I were able to sneak back north in early March to participate in the wedding of one of our close friends, Colin Martin. The ceremony took place in Whistler, British Columbia. We had an amazing weekend, finding time to bundle up, get on our telemark



Still life of a wooden spoon, captured in this stunning photograph

photo by David Katz

boards, and get out for some turns in very fresh powder. Incredible! We also had a fantastic time seeing friends after almost 3 years away from the Pacific Northwest, and hope to find ourselves up that way again soon and often over the years. We hope that this newsletter finds you all well and enjoying the warmer weather. We are growing anxious for the rains so that we can begin planting again, and will be looking forward to see how the roads hold up during the rainy season. Please drop us a line when you get the chance to let us know how you're doing. We plan to be back north in the fall, and hope to see many of you then, and also expect to see some of you down here on your travels before then.

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RM Program News: Summary of Renewable Energy Hands On Workshop

We seemingly broke all sorts of records during February's renewable energy workshop, perhaps the most notable being our first foray into the world of 40+ guests. Things got undeniably out of hand at times, as we pushed our resources to their outer limits. We pulled it off in the end, and not only survived, but thrived during an incredible, whirlwind week when we built one permanent and many temporary solar ovens, installed a passive solar shower at Jeanne's, inaugurated an active solar photovoltaic system down at Doña María's, and organized a huge pizza party and ping pong tourney. Those of you coming down in the approaching months and years can take advantage of our newly found solar cooking ability (though the oven still needs some work) and warm showers over at Jeanne's. Doña María, with lights in her house for the first time in her life, is now offering homestays for the more adventurous visitors who want to spend a night or two with her down in the "bajo". We would like to send out a sincere thanks to all of the participants of the workshop, CARY, BOB, ERIC, KEVIN, JEFF, MARK, MARTHA, DEE, LISA, SUE, PEGGY, TITA,

KRISTINA, LLOYD, GATHERING, CATHY, BRENDAN, DEAN, SKIP, GILBERTH, ALEX, and JUANICO and our guest speakers and instructors, JAY, IAN, LUIS HERNAN, HANNIA, DAVE, RICHARD and MILTON. All of the above mentioned were instrumental in making this an enormously successful event. I would also like to take this opportunity to offer a special thank you to EUGENIO LOPEZ GARCIA, a member of Fundación Durika outside of Buenos Aires in Pérez Zeledón and a biologist/ecologist who donated his valuable time and knowledge to translate for the entirety of the course, an incredibly exhausting job, in addition to leading nature hikes every morning before breakfast. His presence was felt by everyone here and helped make the course the special event that it was. We have hopes of continuing to host this workshop in the coming years, and have tentatively set dates aside for next year during the month of February. We will publish more information as soon as we have it.

Conservation Update: Creating a Buffer for La Cangreja

Now that La Cangreja is a national park, government officials, representatives of La Fundación Ecotrópica, environmentalists and we at the Ranch are looking for ways to enlarge the buffer zone that surrounds the park. By securing presently unused lands that adjoin La Cangreja, we can begin to establish an area around the park that will further protect and enhance the flora and fauna of the region by adding more habitat to the relatively small protected area. By creating the Rancho Mastatal Private Wildlife Refuge last year, we took a first step to add an important sanctuary outside but adjacent to La Cangreja. We are now going through the same process with the Ministry of the Environment so that Leo's property achieves the same status. These activities also help contribute to our goal of promoting our regional biological corridor, which will hopefully someday "connect" our area with the Carara National and the Zona Protectora Los Cerros de Turrubares to the west, and the Zona Protectora Cerro Carraigres to the east.

According to locals, the forests in and around Mastatal are the most extensive that they have seen in many decades. We have heard many speaking of animals returning that they have not seen in years. We hope that this is indeed true. On a recent walk into the forest, biologist and ecologist EUGENIO GARCIA LOPEZ saw and identified a beautiful bird named a sunbittern, a species that he had only seen one other time in his life in Monteverde. We hope that these types of experiences continue to occur and increase in the coming years.

With everyone's help in assuring that our forests remain intact, while providing economic opportunities for the local population, the future will be bright for Mastatal.

Building Report: Bamboo Barn and Passive Solar Shower

Refinements continue with two recently built structures, the "galerón", or barn, and the shower structure over at Jeanne's, both featuring bamboo construction. HILBERTH VINDAS and ALEX HERNANDEZ, two locals that work with us at the Ranch, have continued to enhance the new barn by installing a practical shelving system that has begun to receive and protect from the elements our wood, bamboo, tubing, and other longer and bulkier supplies. The barn will help free up much needed space both at the main house and at Jeanne's. We now have room for a place to paint and draw, and an area for gardening preparation. With the additional breathing room, and recent improvements, the main house continues to be transformed into a comfy little home for Robin and I

and our guests. GUS SINSHEIMER has been spearheading the work on the new shower at Jeanne's, with the help of a number of volunteers and others including EMILY GREEN, MEGHAN VITA, ERIN HANLON, and MATEO BLAIR. The two new stalls will triple our shower capacity over there, and users won't be threatened by the sometimes shocking electric showerheads that heat our other showers, as the new water is heated by the sun. Aside from being functional, this structure, as with many of our new structures, is a pure pleasure to look at. We predict it will soon be donning the cover of "Rural Latin America's Coolest Passive Solar Showers".

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Torneos

I started my morning at 5:30, organizing all the Top Trumps Lord of the Rings Playing Cards: The Two Towers cards into a cultural hierarchy. Emily is still shaking her head. A certain fever has taken hold of the front porch of Tim and Robin's house, where cards are dealt, Middle-Earth hangs in limbo, and the balance of good and evil lies in the hands of several addicted volunteers. I'm still not sure if Treebeard and the Ents should have a higher status than the One Ring, but I'm sure by the end of the day we will have reached a consensus and resumed play. Last week we developed a new tournament on the front porch, affectionately known as the "Who's Your T-Daddy Top Trumps Tournament, 2004." After several hours of head-to-head competition, Deep Blue (a.k.a. Robin) emerged as the victor. I'm not sure how the Top Trumps fever started. All I know is it came from England and it is a game that requires little skill but provides hours of enjoyment. As simple and bizarre as this card game may seem, deep passion and excitement can be found in the hearts of Humans gathered in this small town, reveling in the glory of Gandychops the White, and the slimy filth of worthless Grima Wormtongue.

The life of the tournament was born before Top Trumps. It all started when the ping pong table was built. Gringos and Ticos alike found their competitive spirits emerging and were overcome with the desire to become "the best player in Mastatal." Tonight we embark on a new tourney as defending champion, Alex Ramirez Hernandez, will fight to keep his title, most likely against the previous grand champion, his brother, Junior. Our last competition (the Center School Hog-Pong Tournament) brought out most of Mastatal to the ping-pong arena, cheering, eating "chicharones", and growing tense as we neared the final games. Some might say ping pong is replacing football in this town. Strong words, but the intensity of play and regular practicing hours exhibited by a few dedicated young athletes may prove fruitful for Costa Rica's Olympic team. Future visitors to Rancho Mastatal be ready, the tourney fever will take hold of you too.

Community Facts/Stories: School's in Sesh

February marks the beginning of the school year, and the return of laughing kids to the streets of Mastatal. Mastatal's elementary school welcomed two new students this year, MELISSA, Maritza's youngest daughter, and ROBERT, Freddie's oldest son. The "telesecundaria" added another year to its program in 2004 and now offers 7th and 8th grade instruction for those kids living in the towns of Zapatón, La Fila de Aguacate, San Miguel and Mastatal that do not want or are unable to travel to the regional high school in the town of La Gloria, about a 50 minute bus ride from our town. Enrollment has increased significantly as a result of the added year and the growing popularity with the "telesecundaria".

Comida Corner: Peanut Sauce with Ginger, Lime and Cilantro

This is another one of the peanut sauces that we use at the Ranch. It comes from our cooking bible,

The Rebar Modern Food Cookbook, and has pleased the palates of many guests here. It is quick, easy and oh so good.

"Intense flavors in this dynamic sauce give new life to a simple bowl of steamed rice and vegetables. Toss with chilled noodles and crisp vegetables and you have an instant lunch or dinner...either way, use this sauce sparingly and feel free to tamper with the proportions in the recipe. It also multiplies nicely."

Yield $\frac{3}{4}$ cup

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup smooth, natural peanut butter 2 garlic cloves, minced 1 tbsp minced ginger 2 tbsp honey $\frac{1}{4}$ cup minced cilantro leaves juice of 1 lime 1 tbsp sesame oil 1 tsp sambal oelek (hot sauce) $\frac{1}{4}$ cup soy sauce 2 tbsp rice wine vinegar

1. In the bowl of a food processor or blender, add all of the ingredients from the garlic through to the sambal oelek. Blend until smooth. Add the remaining ingredients, blend and season to taste. 2. This sauce can also be made by hand, using a bowl and whisk or wooden spoon. Blending the peanut butter with the other ingredients may require some elbow grease. To help it along, try gently heating the peanut butter to make it a little bit runny and easier to stir.

Helpful Hint: This sauce will stiffen up considerably in the fridge. Adjust the consistency by stirring in a little warm water, stock or coconut milk. Or heat the sauce gently on the stove until it loosens up.

Buen Provecho!

Inspirational Impressions: Resources

"The scarcest resource is not oil, metals, clean air, capital, labor, or technology. It is our willingness to listen to each other and learn from each other and to seek the truth rather than seek to be right."

- Donella Meadows, (1941-2001), founder of the Sustainability Institute

Hasta pronto.

Tim and Robin