

Rancho Mastatal Updates



A foundation project to get the community to paint the walls of the Mastatal community center

October 2005

Saludos de Costa Rica de nuevo. This latest report once again comes to you from our little haven in Mastatal. We didn't expect to be able to get this to you so soon after arriving back but with the initiative, creativity and diligence of BRIAN O'ROURKE and LIZ FALK we're beginning to catch up on our backlog once more. Thanks so much to the both of you. You're both so amazing and such an integral part of this place. Robin and I said our goodbyes in New York State on November 30 with mixed emotions. Our spell home was filled with spending time with loving family

and friends, catching up on Ranch computer projects, reading a few books, and getting mentally and otherwise prepared for the upcoming year. December unofficially marked the close of our 2005 season. It also indicates the beginning of our new year, promised to be filled with innovative projects and fresh faces, and of course the start of Costa Rica's holiday season. You may want to think twice about heading to Costa Rica's beaches without a reservation in the coming weeks. They'll be mobbed during one of the busiest times of the year here. As is always the case, the first week after arriving back to our paradise was filled with transitional tasks; debriefing with those that watched the Ranch while we were gone, restocking supplies, paying bills, and catching up on local gossip and with old friends. December has always been one of our favorite months here. The rains become less frequent, the foliage is still a blinding green, and our activities have not yet ramped up to the crazy levels that they generally reach and sustain come January. The "choza" looks amazing. The cob work is all but done and it's time to concentrate on details while we wait for the sand, straw and clay to dry so that we can begin the monstrous task of plastering. We'll be looking forward to see our resident lime expert's face in early January. ROGER also escapes this time of year to spend the holiday season with his wonderful family in England. Love to you TOM, SYLVIA and BRIAN! Upon driving through our gates in the wee hours of December 2, we would've been happy to simply see the main house still standing. What we found when daylight came far surpassed our expectations. The main classroom structure is standing tall, Tiburón has a new nursery, and the workshop space is twice the size as it was in September. These changes all took place in addition to the aforementioned advancements to the "choza". The Ranch looks as good as it ever has. Once more, we cannot express enough our gratitude to everyone that kept this place going during the months of October of November, the rainiest months on record since our arrival to the area four years ago. We were happy to hear that the groups from Villanova and Jennings High School did not have to paddle their way out of Mastatal. Everyone has been pleased to see the sun these past two weeks. The roads are again passable and the Slip-n-Slide to the Hooch has

finally dried up. Our list of building projects continues to explode. We're hosting a wonderful group of volunteers at the moment including ROB HANKEY, an Englishman, who is heading up the construction of a new structure for long-term volunteers. This should be music to the ears of future long-termers who are often times shuffled from bed to bed during their stays at the Ranch. It's looking as if the new building will be located a bit beyond the Hooch off the trail and in the forest. It's a wonderful site. The materials palette will include the regulars, bamboo, cob and local wood. As seems a bit more common each year, we're looking forward to welcome back a number of friends to Mastatal this year. We've already seen the return of GEOFF and DESA who plan to spend the next three months with us and we're hoping to welcome back TYLER, ZEBBA, AARON, TIBURON, IAN, DAVE, ANDREA, MARIA, ANNA, SUSAN and many others during the course of the year. We're feeling pretty energized at the moment, as much from our lengthened visit to the States as from the pure excitement of being back in the midst of such amazing people and projects. We hope that you can come down and join in on the fun soon. Hasta la próxima vez.

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RM Program News: Villanova University

A GIGANTIC THANKS YOU to Tiburon, Tim and Robin. It has been a long-time dream of mine to lead students on sustainable education trips. Thank you for giving me this opportunity, for trusting me and for making my dream come true.

And, of course, THANK YOU to the group from Villanova University!!! LIZ PRUTTING, NATALIA MIRANDA, ALLISON KONICK, COLIN DARRETTA, JENNIFER KUSNER, LAUREL FULHAM, CAROLYN ARENDACS, CRISTINA STELLA, JUSTIN ENGLISH, MARK LOTTO, JILL BETTERS, KIM WHITE, KELLY DOYLE, NICK FERRAIOLI, AND SARA HORSTMANN. To all those educators who say that there is no such thing as the perfect group of students, they are wrong. You guys are each amazing individuals and together, an extraordinary group.

An Ode to the Group from Villanova

Oh Villanova, you were such a pleasure; working with you was like I found a treasure. After hiking through poop for miles and miles, somehow you managed to all maintain your smiles. There was continuous rain from morning 'til night; nonetheless, you never put up a fight. Your snakebites and blisters were painful and swollen, yet your group energy kept everybody rollin'. Our conversations were engaging and real, I think we were all thankful for having Elias at the wheel. You truly showed you were daring and bold by jumping off 60-foot waterfalls into the cold. Next time you will have to meet Tom, because he is truly the bomb, And of course, you will have to stay longer, so that departing is not so somber. So Villanova... thank you, thank you, thank you so much, I truly

hope we will all stay in touch.

Liz Falk

Building Report: The Truth of the Ranch

Almost four years ago, as we all well know, Tim and Robin came to Mastatal to begin building their dream. It was the perfect place; a small and tranquil community of smiling Ticos; a magical setting among primary rainforest drizzled with waterfalls, and easy enough to reach by public bus. Tim and Robin settled in and Rancho Mastatal seemed to evolve from beneath the vines almost as naturally as if it were always here. To an outsider the Ranch of gringos appears peaceful, sitting discreetly behind Caña India and Hibiscus flowers as jam band music and the sweet smell of fresh bread wafts through the air. But, t'was the night of October 31st, 2005 when the truth of the Ranch came clear. The wind began to rage. The front metal gates slammed shut and locked by themselves. The window shutters did the same. From out of the cob work spirits began to stir and apparitions of the torturous past revealed themselves. They spoke to us of the Ranch's haunted history. It went something like this...

It was a nameless place surrounded by barbed-wire fence and dark green, spiky ivy creeping out of every crevice. A cool wind seemed to always howl just barely drowning out the occasional screams. It was a place where children, believed to be insane, were sent for correction by the gringos who inhabited it. Manacles restrained the children's hands and feet as they were forced to do horrendous tasks of manual labor such as landscaping and mixing cow poop with their bare feet. Each night, well after the gringos and the townspeople were fast asleep, the children's eyelids were glued open and they were forced to watch horror movies of zombies, ghosts, and witches. These graphically portrayed the consequences for any misbehaved child. On the nights the invalids were permitted to sleep, they were only given a place on the floor underneath the gringos' beds, where the spiders, scorpions, and snakes preyed on their young flesh and blood all night long. Each day was as horrible as the next. To receive their rations of meatless mush the children crawled through a dark and damp tunnel of their own fowl and filthy clothes.

Despite so much affliction and pain the children astonishingly remained united, strong and brave. Each day they awoke determined to survive. No matter what, they wouldn't let the gringos take their lives or their souls. Their determination worked. After nearly a decade of the misery, the gringos began to grow ill and weak. One by one every gringo at this nameless place began to leave in search of medical assistance. To this day nobody knows for sure what forced these ruthless people away. The spirits told us that they and the Mastataleños believe that the perseverance and positive energy of the children took over, destroying the cruelty and negativity of these gringos. Knowing well that within every entity that creates Rancho Mastatal there exists strength, dedication and vivaciousness, it seems a likely story that the ambitions of the children are living on. And so, for now, the spirits have settled back into the bamboo and cob work. Perhaps they will join us next Hallows Eve. But nevertheless, the true past of the Ranch is known. And now, easing the mystery, there is a slight explanation for the magic and vibe so present here.

Liz Falk Adapted from Halloween stories by Ryan Ferrester and Brian O'Rourke. In honor of the first (hopefully) annual Haunted Ranch, prepared by Jennings High School students and presented

to local Mastatal kids.

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: A Perfect Match

Well... the first of October came upon us quickly at the Ranch. Tim, Robin and Roger were preparing for their journeys North. Timo was busier than ever reconfirming important details with employees and townspeople, Robin was diligently checking kitchen supplies so no one would go without curried soups and sweet breads, and Roger was, well... Roger was crying in the corner hugging Chingo. Unlike usual, all was not "tranquilo" at the Ranch. Then, in the midst of all the mayhem, over the sounds of weed whackers, dogs barking, and the sobbing from the corner, came the most beautiful singing. It was not the usual lullabies from the birds, nor was it from the stereo. What was that sound? That song? That OPERA? Everybody stopped to listen. To look. And there, from behind the dust of the bondo bus the aria grew louder and louder. Bonnie and Matt had arrived in Mastatal. Almost immediately, as though they were Ranch natives, chaos was alleviated and a sense of normalcy resumed.

Bonnie and Matt, two newly wed lovebirds that met in opera class at the University of Colorado-Boulder, are running the Ranch while Tim and Robin are in the States. Bonnie, a hip-chick from New Jersey now seeking a PhD. in Voice and working as a part-time food critic and nutritionist for Gourmet Magazine, perfectly falls into the role as kitchen manager. Matt, a totally rad guy from California, head librarian at the CU Environmental Center, and a detail-oriented chemist, is the ideal "go-to man" for employees, staff and townspeople. The Ranch couldn't be in better hands. Bonnie and Matt... Like two peas in a pod. They are a perfect match for each other and an incredible asset to the Ranch. They arrived in Mastatal without knowing exactly what to expect and easily jumped into their roles like the tick in Pico's nose. Despite some frustrations, sicknesses, and uncertainties at times, they are sustaining the Ranch in perfect order. Each day the cats are fed, the laundry is hung out to dry, the conch is blown and hands are clasped in circle. Each day people laugh, learn, and love and the magic of the Ranch has not skipped a beat. THANK YOU Bonnie and Matt, for working so hard and giving so much. You are terrific.

Liz Falk

Community Facts/Stories: Take Me Down to the Infirmary

More of the Rancho Loyal Brigade came in wounded today. Ankles have been twisting and bending in ways we once considered impossible. Feet are swelling from the vicious attacks of mammoth mosquitoes and microscopic no-see-ums as the victims cannot help but scratch at the bite-marks, opening flesh that is ripe for infection. Knees have buckled under the pressure of long hikes and uneven terrain. Even spiders are on the attack with their razorblade jaws and burning acidic urine. This isn't the worst of it. Our tools are developing minds of their own, and they are angry over years of mishandling and abuse. A machete threw itself at one of our leader's legs in a kamikaze mission that almost cut to the bone. A simple earring stabbed at our head nurse's ear causing it to explode, our first such attack in the infirmary. Things are getting out of control, and what is obviously becoming an inside job has recently gained even more power. The opposing forces somehow infiltrated our immune systems. Germs have been consistently stealing voices, drilling into throats, hammering away at ribs, and placing heads in vices. The torture. The madness. And for what purpose? How will destiny look upon the Rancho Loyal Brigade?

The Loyal leaders, as battered and beaten as they may be, have responded with force. With a mixture of prior knowledge and ongoing intensive research as we thumb through the pages of various natural and nutritional healing books, the Loyals have observed the start of a retreat by the opposition. Bonnie and Lily have been mixing powerful potions that have been healing throats by gargling. Liz and Mike, our plant experts, have also concocted healing teas and remedies. Ryan has many of us turning to raw garlic, which has turned out to be very powerful ammunition (not to mention its ability to keep lingering vampires from our Halloween festivities away). Our zen-master Dan keeps everyone at peace. Our head nurse, Kristen, has been working around the clock to ensure personal stability through first-aid and keep morale high. Matt, our pilot, has been swift in his response to evacuate those under the most extreme conditions. Limited mobility has kept Vero and I cracking jokes with elevated limbs in a feeble attempt to improve our own sanity and that of others affected. Meanwhile, Maddi is our lookout person keeping an eye on everything from high atop Leo's property.

We will not go quietly into the night. Today, we will fight back against those who are attempting to destroy us so that we may see a tomorrow. Negative energy will be thrown back into the wind so that it may be sent back to its origin or dissolved into nothing. As we continue to grow, we create new energies that make the Rancho Loyal Brigade stronger by the second. The rainy season is on its way out, and the skies are opening their bright blue eyes. The opposition is dissipating with the clouds, and victory is on the horizon. We can all feel it coming, and everything seems to be switching back to our side. Destiny is smiling upon us. The Loyals have been standing strong together, and nothing can break clasped hands when they refuse to let go.

Brian O'Rourke

Comida Corner: Banana Ice Cream

Yields 4 Servings 4 bananas peeled and frozen 1/4-1/2 cup milk Tad of honey Cashews and/or chocolate (optional)

Place first three ingredients in food processor (or smash by hand) and blend until smooth. Add optional toppings as desired. Enjoy within a few hours.

Inspirational Impressions: Personal Legend

The Soul of the World is nourished by people's happiness. And also by unhappiness, envy, and jealousy. To realize one's Personal Legend is a person's only real obligation. All things are one. And, when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.

-Paulo Coelho (The Alchemist)

Happy Holidays!

Abrazos,

Tim, Robin, Roger, Sparky, Liz, Ryan, and the Crew