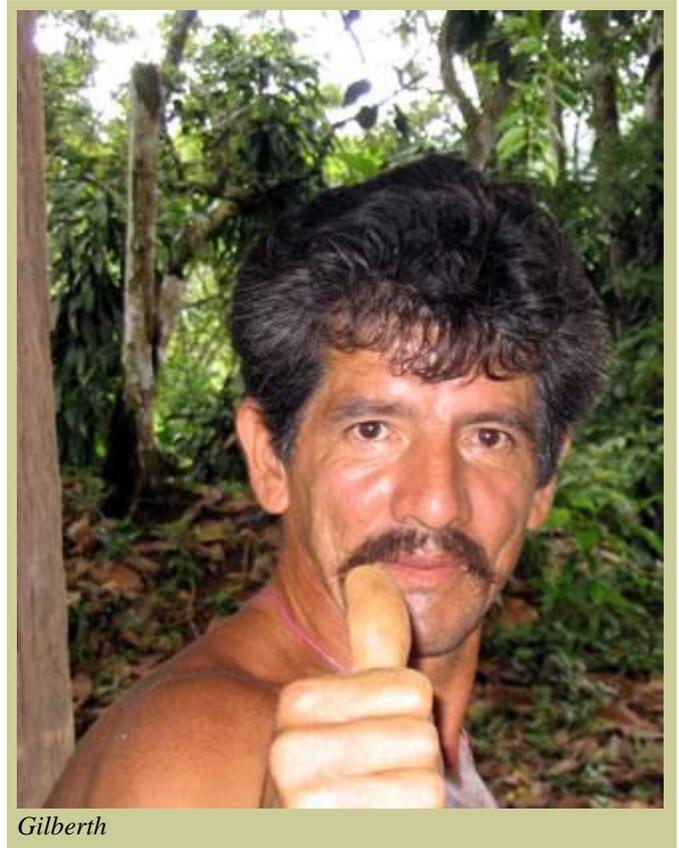


Rancho Mastatal Updates

August 2005

I planned on sending August's update to you from Mastatal. ROGER and the other contributors had the vast majority of the newsletter done almost 1 month ago. They passed it onto me then so that I could add this brief introduction and read through the content. Here I am now in Vestal, NY in the midst of frantic wedding preparations adding these final words and doing some minor editing so that it can be sent to all of you for your reading pleasure. I apologize for the delay and thank Roger, RYAN, KATHLEEN, MICHELLE and everyone else involved for making this month's update a reality. We left Mastatal a bit over one week ago with mixed emotions, leaving our friends and unfinished projects on our way to the United States to see family and other friends whom we haven't seen for almost a year. The departure was hectic, preparing those that will be managing the Ranch in our absence, finishing the cob walls of our house, wrapping up with our last group, making last minute purchases and paying bills, and packing for our two-month sojourn in New York State. We need to express our utmost gratitude to my cousin BONNIE DRAINIA and her husband MATT HECK who are manning the fort in Mastatal. They have allowed us to take this time to finally share our wedding vows and spend precious time with family and friends. We also would like to thank BRIAN O'ROURKE, RYAN FERESTER, KRISTEN TJERARDSSEN, DAN DROUGHTON, MADDIE STEVENSON, and LIZ FALK for their efforts in keeping the Ranch operational in our absence. By keeping the Ranch open, it allows us to keep on our entire staff employed during these traditionally slower months. The Ranch crew will be receiving groups from Villanova University and Jennings High School in Minnesota while we are away. They undoubtedly have their work cut out for them. Our stay to date in NY has been fabulous, walks in the gorge, wine tasting in the Finger Lakes, catching up with family, watching nieces and nephews play soccer and softball, and of course making final preparations for the wedding this Saturday. We're looking forward to recharge our batteries in the coming weeks so as to get ready for another amazing year in Mastatal. Enjoy!



Gilberth

This month's update includes:

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Building Report: Make Way for the Classroom!

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RM Program News: International Program on Sustainable Development

The end of August saw the arrival of a much anticipated University of Washington program that focuses on community and environmental assessment in Costa Rica. The month-long, 12-credit study-abroad program has meant that we have a kick-ass group of students from UW's Seattle and Bothell campuses. A big welcome back to Professor CHUCK HENRY! It's a pleasure to have our multi-talented, compost toilet-loving friend amongst us once again. We also see the return of RHONDA SCHMIDT, 'Best Robot Dancer in Bremerton', as Chuck's fearless teaching assistant.

The cracking crew of intrepid students is settling in just fine. Five strapping young bucks are accompanied by a harem of twelve bronzed hotties. Following a spectacular three-day visit to the Nicoya Peninsula, ALLISON MITCHELL, BEN BARRETT, CASEY FROMSON, CATHERINE GRIFFITH, JAMES BOZIC, JEFF HARRISON, JON ROGERS, KRISTEN HOUSTEN, LINDSAY CRAMER, LUCIENNE GUYOT, MARIE SANDONA, MEGAN OLDFIELD, MELANIE WELCH, NATALIE GRAVES, NICK BAKER, SHERI DAVIS and MEGAN TURNER are getting to grips with life and times in the village.

En Route to Mastatal, Roger led the group to the awesome Manzanillo paradise of NATTY GREW on the Nicoya Peninsula. It was a fantastic introduction to Costa Rica, particularly due to the kindness of Natty, his biologist girlfriend ANITA, and our guide MAREN BARBEE. We spent time discussing local environmental issues, and of course, making the most of the stunning beach. Everyone participated in the first phase of a major restoration project by planting 150 hardwood and softwood saplings. Natty hosted a fascinating discussion on the property while outlining their intricate management proposal. Two PRETOMA biologists gave a talk on turtle protection in the area, and the lovely Maren kept us busy in our free time with surfing lessons, kayaking and horseback riding. An unforgettable experience all round and one we are sure to repeat with groups in the future.

During their time in Mastatal, our daring students will be undertaking a number of individual and group projects. A cultural component to the course means that students will be studying aspects of 'tico' life, including religion, leisure, education, gender roles and health care. They will gain invaluable project material from trips to the high school in La Gloria, homestays, visits to the clinic, and Thursday mass. This cultural component complements the bulk of the course - a group bamboo design and build, along with individual student projects. Such personal ventures include a cob oven for the community centre, much-needed drainage control work at the soccer field, rainwater catchment and the cataloging of traditional medicinal herbs. It's a truly exciting atmosphere and the Ranch is buzzing with creative ideas and project-planning. We are all, needless to say, very much looking forward to an awesome, action-packed September with our new buddies from the Northwest.

Roger O'Whalley

Conservation Update: Scrap the Ranch, We're Building Condos!

Perusing the "Tico Times," the Costa Rican English Language Gringo Newspaper, one might find many interesting things: Dengue Fever cases on the rise, corruption in the government, art students in San José attempting to beautify the city, and what's this??? A big fat bearded gringo sitting in a lounge by the beach with his laptop flopped open on his hairy thighs. The caption reads, "Bookmakers, Agents, Runners...Are you making thousands a week while lying on the beach somewhere? If you're not, you should be, and you can! Easily! Guaranteed"!

That's a great idea! You sit there getting fatter while arranging for people to place bets online and funnel yourself a great living in the meantime. Nevermind the humble locals working their asses off for less than two bucks an hour building your mansion, it's just not your fault that they weren't lucky enough to be born in the US of A. Besides, if they were as smart as you, they would be doing the exact same thing!

Oh, and lookie here! Full page spread, back of the paper: "Your best investment in Playas del Coco, Guanacaste." Some expert American land developers have put their genius to work in the heart of the lovely Guanacaste region. Remember that stupid stretch of jungle spread out by the beach last year? These visionaries have managed to cram 400 cookie-cutter condos onto those 50 acres, complete with concrete roads and swimming pools! Now when you swim out into the surf you can turn around and smile at the little slice of American suburbia beyond the beach. And none of this hippie green-building mumbo jumbo, everything has been done cheap and conventionally and these babies are priced to sell!

Perhaps Timo and Robin will wake up one day soon and realize the opportunity they are sitting on right here in Mastatal. It's not the greatest land for building, but surely with the expertise of these developers, we could at least lay down 800 to 1000 condos. There's a fortune to be made and ...ouch!!! Timo just slapped the crap out of me. What am I talking about? Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

It is so simple to forget one's ideals when easy opportunity knocks at the door and flashes its big Yankee dollar breasts in your face. And besides, most of us find ourselves so wrapped up in providing for a family or a future that ideals become impractical. But I wonder if it is a matter of feasibility or simply a lack of vision. What if every human being on this earth actually sat down and thought for a day what they would love to do in their lifetime, something that incorporated the greater good of others and could still provide income for themselves or their family? Surely some new ideas might fill the mental air.

And it wouldn't matter if these visions were ever accomplished, so long as people were at least striving for something they believed in. Lives might actually become filled with a sense of purpose. It seems sad that in this technologically advanced world people so often settle for a job they hate simply for the paycheck. Satisfaction is its' own paycheck and rewarding work is something that fulfills and enriches life. If you've never really thought about it, give yourself a few minutes today and figure out what your inner vision is calling you to do. It may seem impossible, but your enthusiasm and true conviction can be the means to make it happen.

And imagine if humans gathered as a species and developed a vision for the future of life on this planet before the damage was completely irreparable, or just decided that whatever happens we can agree to not kill each other. Wait a minute, that's a little evolved for humans, now I'm being impractical! One step at a time.

Ryan Ferester

Building Report: Make Way for the Classroom!

In the hope of providing a more comfortable space for future groups to hold classes in, the first phases of building a new classroom have begun. A beautiful spot has been cleared near Jeannie's house and the plans Robin has been diligently working on for months are beginning to take form.

Step one will be the core classroom space. This will be a 24 ft. by 24 ft. room done in the traditional Rancho Mastatal green extravagance: cob floors, cob and wattle and daub walls, bamboo posts, framing and decking, etcetera, etcetera. The hope is to have the postholes dug and the bamboo cleaned and prepared for building before the arrival of MARTÍN COTO in early September. Martín is a bamboo expert from the San José area who has guided projects here in the past. Martín will be spending five days at the ranch during which time the general framework of the room will be constructed on the ground and later hoisted into place. The following couple of days will be long ones as the roof is quickly assembled with a combination of tin and a clear plastic clerestory for skylighting.

From the sketches, the room looks to be very open and well-circulated. Half walls will allow plenty of fresh air to pass through and the skylights will provide ample natural lighting during the day. The classroom should be a usable space by the end of September but will be an ongoing project for several months thereafter. Later phases include a beautiful wrap-around porch area with bamboo and wood decking that should be a perfect spot for students to relax and study in rocking chairs and hammocks. There will also be an attached "breathable" bodega for storing educational supplies and equipment.

This project will be certainly slowing progress on Timo and Robin's house for a time but it has become priority 'número uno' and will certainly be a boon for all future groups who come to visit. We'll keep you posted!

Ryan Ferester

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Does your poop float?

So your mom told you to eat your veggies but do you really understand the medicinal qualities of food. Here are our top tips on what to eat to stay healthy...

No. 1 Garlic This panacea or 'cure all' of the culinary world not only tastes good but has antibacterial and antiviral properties, and you can even use garlic as a poultice on wound infections. In Chinese medicine, garlic is known to help overcome stagnant qi energy by balancing the obstructive effects of excess meat and other dietary extremes. When eaten on a daily basis, garlic is preventative against the cold virus and research has shown that eating garlic is effective in killing

the bacteria that causes stomach ulcers.

No 2. Ginger This delicious root will soothe an upset stomach, calm nausea and enhance digestion. Studies suggest that Ginger is even safe for pregnant mothers, which is great because morning sickness can be quite uncomfortable and taking prescription medications is discouraged. Ginger is also thought to reduce spasms and cramps, and hence can be helpful with menstrual cramps.

No. 3 Beets, Carrots, Artichokes, Leafy Greens and Turmeric This combination of foods is extremely beneficial in promoting a healthy liver which is especially important for those eating a standard western diet. Shockingly, your average American actually eats an excess of animal products and far too few vegetables which makes hard work for your liver. By simply adding in happy liver foods, increasing vegetables and decreasing meats in your diet, you will notice a difference in how you feel. You will have increased energy and your body will have an easier time digesting food.

No. 4 Water Everyone knows it's important to drink plenty of water and here's why. The majority of your body weight is actually water, and each cell requires sufficient water to metabolize nutrients and remove waste products. The average person should drink 1-2 liters of water every day and if you're drinking enough your pee should be a light yellow colour. The kind of water you drink is important too – tap water often has excess chlorine and other pollutants. Either buy filtered water (in glass bottles!) or filter your own. There's plenty to read up on water quality...we recommend you do your own research on pollutants, pH, minerals and energetic properties.

No. 5 Tea Everyone loves it... its comforting, its soothing and best of all its good for you. There's green tea, black tea, chamomile, sage, peppermint, ginger, chai and about a thousand other kinds. In fact, 'tea' actually means the water extraction of an herb and here's a brief introduction to some of the potential benefits. Chamomile is relaxing and great at bedtime, both peppermint and ginger promote digestion, green and black have plenty of anti-oxidants, sage is antiseptic and will soothe a sore throat and shorten the common cold. And lastly, chai is a wonderful mix of cinnamon, cardamom, nutmeg, cloves, black pepper, fennel and black tea which can be warming, stimulate digestion, balance blood sugar levels and it tastes good too.

Your food not only provides essential nutrients for every cell in your body but specific foods can be used in a medicinal manner to heal and bring the body back into balance. With the above items we've only scratched the surface of how your diet can maintain health. One easy way of knowing if your diet includes adequate water, fiber and vegetable intake is – sorry to say – an easy to pass poo that floats before flushing.

Michelle Leyton and Kathleen O'Halloran ND

Community Facts/Stories: Something about Erin

Many people know one of our favourite Mastatal alumni, Erin Hanlon. Following countless months of dedicated volunteering and studious work with the University of Washington, Erin is back in Mastatal once again. This time, however, I haven't seen her reading textbooks on the back porch, or anywhere near a cookie sheet. In fact, Erin's not been seen around the Ranch much at all. In order

to set things straight, over a beer on the porch, I asked Erin “so what are you actually doing?” Something quite exciting, it turns out.

Last time Erin was here, the wheels were put in motion to do her ‘capstone’ project in Mastatal. This is a senior project which is a culmination of all the skills learned in university. Having taken almost 30 university credits here (a joint record with Meghan Vita), Erin felt she knew the community, the students and the language, “I have had so many experiences in Costa Rica, and that’s why I wanted to come back, because I wanted to give back to the community” Erin says. Mastatal is the second phase of her capstone project, the ‘hands-on’ part following careful preparation.

Erin’s work here involves the comparison between environmental education in the US and in Costa Rica. She has been teaching marine education at the Seattle Aquarium during the months leading up to this trip. Here in Costa Rica, Miss Hanlon is teaching 5 weeks of environmental sustainability classes at three local schools. Once back in Seattle, Erin will make a presentation to her advisors on her experiences, on what was accomplished and how it fits into the big picture of the community.

The bulk of Erin’s time will be spent working with the ‘telesecundaria’ in Mastatal. However, classes will also be taught in San Miguel and perhaps most excitingly, in La Fila Del Aguacate, a 2 hours walk from Mastatal and a school with only six students. The plan in La Fila is to spend a whole day with the students covering all the material, due to the remote location of the school.

The curriculum was open when she came down and so Erin asked the students what they wanted to study. The answers she received are reflected in her lesson topics of soils, global warming, and marine science. Erin was surprised to see so many students already aware of the impact of humans and interested in what can be done about it.

Not only keen to introduce global issues, Erin also hopes to focus on the local area, “I wanted to make links to the national park...to have a respect for that, I guess, and to see why Costa Rica is successful with eco-tourism, and why it is important here to protect and care about the environment, but without directly forcing that on them. I don’t think they get a lot of environmental education options, so I just want to give them an idea”.

To date, Erin has talked about soils and why they are how they are in Costa Rica and the rest of the world. In addition, Erin and the kids will be landscaping in front of the community centre, combining soils lectures with practical experience.

The response has been great, according to Erin, “Some of the students have told me they are interested in studying biology or marine biology...so, so far so good”. Their involvement in the project and in class is a sign that it’s going really well - so much so, the teachers are even interested and asking questions.

As if all this good work weren’t enough, Erin has another joker down her crop top. I’d caught wind of some sort of grant money she had won, and so probed deeper, “Basically, I won a Mary Gates Leadership Grant”, I’m told. It seems that last January, Erin applied to the foundation with an essay

outlining what she wanted to do and the reason's why she should be chosen. Nine months and several interviews later, here she is in Mastatal, with \$1,500 a quarter to work on her project.

Erin describes the motivation for applying for the scholarship as a desire to open doors for the local kids, "...because nobody really knows what will come of the national park here because it's new...even right now people go on guided hikes and that's a source of income for them, so I wanted them to be able to see the opportunities in working with the environment in a country like CR."

In case you happen to be in Seattle at the end of May, Erin will be talking about all of her experiences at the Mary Gates Leadership Symposium, held at the University of Washington. ROCK ON, Erin, and good luck. Roger O'Whalley

Comida Corner: Seeded Buttermilk Biscuits with Cheese

These easy-to-make little treats make any brunch a winner. Inspired by several recent visitors from the South, they have quickly made it onto the Sunday morning top ten, y'all.

2 cups all purpose pastry or whole-wheat pastry flour 2 teaspoons baking powder ½ teaspoon baking soda ½ teaspoon salt 1 cup coarsely grated then finely chopped cheese, Cheddar or Gruyere work well 6 tablespoons butter 1 cup buttermilk (or 1 cup milk and 1 tablespoon lemon juice)

For the topping: 1 beaten egg Poppy or sesame seeds

Pre-heat the oven to 450°F. If you have a baking stone, heat the oven for an extra 10 minutes. Otherwise, lightly grease a sheet pan and set aside.

Combine the dry ingredients, including the cheese, and work in the butter with your fingers until it looks like coarse meal. Pour in the buttermilk and stir with a fork until moist. Lightly flour the counter, turn out the dough, and pat it into a circle about ¼ inch thick. Cut into rounds - a glass or cookie-cutter works well. Roll the scraps out and cut them out as well.

Brush the tops with the beaten egg and sprinkle generously with poppy or sesame seeds. Bake the biscuits directly on the hot baking stone or on the sheet pan until light brown, about 15-20 minutes. Yummy.

From: 'Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone' by Deborah Madison.

Inspirational Impressions: A Mahatma Message

"There is more to life than increasing its speed."

-Mahatma Ghandi

Abrazos,

Everyone at the Ranch