

# Rancho Mastatal Updates

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## July 2005

*STOP! TAKE A DEEP BREATH. FORGET WHAT YOU ARE DOING. TAKE 10 MINUTES TO ESCAPE TO ANOTHER WORLD. IT WILL MAKE YOUR DAY BETTER THAN IT OTHERWISE WILL BE.* Another newsletter out on time. Another big thank you to **BRIAN O'ROURKE**. Unfortunately for us, and luckily for his friends and family back in the States, Brian will be taking some months away from the Ranch to head north to attend a few weddings, including his brother's in MT and ours in NY, and see friends and family before once again gracing us with his presence in Mastatal towards the end of the year. Brian is the last to depart of a stellar crew of core volunteers that worked and learned with us during the last 6 weeks. They are making way for two large groups heading our direction in the coming days and weeks, the first from the University of Peace (UPeace) here in Costa Rica and the second from the University of Washington (UW), Bothell Campus in the State of Washington, USA. UPeace's visit will be their first to the Ranch. **LIZ FALK**, a former Ranch intern and a student currently working towards her Masters in Natural Resources and Sustainable Development at UPeace convinced her professors and colleagues that the Ranch's activities could provide an invaluable learning opportunity for everyone involved in her program. Efforts to establish the University for Peace began at the United Nations under the leadership of then President of Costa Rica, Rodrigo Carazo. On December 5, 1980, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution which set out in its annex the International Agreement for the Establishment of the University for Peace. The Charter of the University forms part of that agreement. Kofi A. Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, is the Honorary President of the University for Peace. It should go without saying that we are ecstatic about this opportunity and trust that this will be the commencement of a long-term relationship with UPeace. The soon-to-arrive UW group is being led by **DR. CHUCK HENRY**, a Senior Lecturer in Environmental Sciences at UW. He will be assisted by **DR. SALLY BROWN**, Research Associate Professor in the College of Forest Resources and **DR. SUSAN BOLTON**, a hydrologist in the Forestry Department at UW's Seattle Campus. The program is a comprehensive study on sustainability and will introduce students to sustainable practices, environmental assessment, and international culture, and will include a service-learning component in which students will design and build a project in Mastatal. The crew will be with us for almost the entire month of September, keeping us plenty busy before our upcoming visit to the States on October 1.



Instruction during a recent bamboo workshop

*Before wrapping up, we'd like to take this opportunity to send our love and best wishes to RYAN FERESTER, a long-term volunteer who recently and regrettably contracted Dengue Fever. He's on the mend and is due back in Mastatal in the coming days. We're anxious to have him back amongst our ranks as his energy, smile and active backside are all sorely missed. We'd also like to welcome back two Ranch veterans, ERIN HANLON and MEGHAN VITA. Erin will be in Mastatal for a number of weeks working on an academic project while Meghan is here for a quick visit before beginning her work with Americorps in Seattle next month. September promises to be a ballbuster. The new house, a large university group, an ensuing wedding and life in general in Mastatal. Oh yeah. One last things worth mentioning. Finally, Robin is back making jewelry. Get in line. We hope that you'll come and pay us a visit soon.*

*Timo*

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### **RM Program News: UVM Crew**

We were just recently visited by a very enthusiastic student group from the University of Vermont, led by Hector Sáez. Hector wanted to make sure that his students could really recognize and grapple with some of the issues in a place like Mastatal. Each of them will be writing papers based on what they experienced here. Bayo decided to take a closer look at community health, including social, mental, and physical health. He is examining why it is supported with the way that it exists in this setting and how it supports a healthy way of living. Mike and Marisa are investigating the cultural implications of US volunteerism in Mastatal and the rest of Costa Rica. Caroline is delving into traditional medicines and different ways of feeling and how that fits into Mastatal. She will be doing a comparative study between new and old medicines while thinking about whether or not Mastatal would want a health center in town. Dana is looking at the healthcare needs of women in Mastatal and in general throughout rural Costa Rica, what is and what is not necessary for them. Caitlin and Shannon teamed up to explore successful education-based approaches in order to foster sustainable rural community development in Costa Rica, Mastatal in particular. Mark is studying traditional building (especially cob) and its importance to the environment and community here as opposed to the concrete buildings that are scattered throughout town. Jake, the businessman of the group, is looking at how Rancho Mastatal has affected this place economically, and how tourism (mainly eco-tourism) has affected other communities in Costa Rica. Since it is difficult to fully research these topics in a matter of weeks, Hector is hoping that they will find a framework in the literature they have read and find studies from other people and places to help them along. The students will take what they have learned here, struggle with it a little bit, and learn how to recognize these issues and think about them systematically.

They went above and beyond what was expected of them, managing to help a great deal around the community as well as the ranch. Thank you Bayo, Mike, Marisa, Caroline, Dana, Caitlin, Shannon, Mark, Jake, and Hector for a visit truly worth remembering. You were all amazing with your help in the kitchen, dancing in the cob mixes (cow dung and all), building the waddle and daub walls, keeping Jeannie's spick and span, cleaning and decorating the community center, making tamales for the dance, digging ditches for better drainage of the soccer field (amazing job... that was some major grunt work), milking cows, making all of us laugh, and always lending that extra hand whenever it was needed. Even though your visit may have only been a week and a half long, this community (including us) will miss you immensely. Your presence here was worth more than could be reflected by measured time. We've also got some new yoga moves to try out now thanks to you... the Houdini, Angry Dolphin, and much more. Hopefully when you are all done, you will come back and see us again. Thanks again everyone for a great stay.

Brian O'Rourke

### **Conservation Update: Management Plan and New Director**

I recently participated in a 2-day meeting with the Ministry of the Environment (MINAE) about La Cangreja National Park's Management Plan. This was the last of a series of meetings having to do with community participation in drafting the Plan. It's been quite a process with contributions being made from a wide array of groups and individuals. It's a mini-miracle that the Plan has come so far in such a short amount of time. Most protected areas in Costa Rica, even those that have been around for decades, still have not completed their Management Plans. And here we are, La Cangreja only 3 years old, and we are reportedly only months away from finishing ours (never mind that Costa Rican law says that Management Plans must be completed within 6 months of an area becoming officially protected). We would like to congratulate the Central Pacific Conservation Area (ACOPAC) office of MINAE and their workers for taking the initiative to bring the communities of Mastatal, San Miguel, Zapatón, Salitrales and La Fila de Aguacate to the table to partake in this monumental task. It is a fine example of collaborative involvement and one that could be emulated throughout the country. MINAE seems to be learning from past mistakes in managing some of the country's other national parks. The final draft of the Management Plan will include ideas and suggestions from the people that the park will most be affecting. The final presentation of the Plan will take place at the Fundación Ecotrópica installations near the entrance to the park in September. We are looking forward to its unveiling. The chance to sustainably develop this park and our communities is a once in a lifetime occasion. The future of our area will be molded in many ways by the ideas that will be solidified in the coming weeks.

During this past weekend's planning session, we received some unfortunate news. The current MINAE director of ACOPAC, Rafael Gutierrez, will be heading for greener pastures on September 15 to become director of the Central Volcanic Conservation Area (ACCVC) which encompasses Braulio Carrillo National Park, Guayabo National Monument, Poás Volcano National Park, Turrialba Volcano National Park, La Selva Protected Zone and other protected areas. He will be taking with him our good friend Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, the current manager of conservation areas for ACOPAC. We are genuinely sorry to see both go as they have done a more than respectable job helping to manage our new park La Cangreja. Miguel has been one of our closest allies during the past 3 years and his hard work was critical in achieving our private wildlife refuge

status two years ago. We would like to wish both Rafael and Miguel the best in their new positions and hope that their replacements will be as competent and interested in protecting the welfare of our forests, animals and communities.

Timo

### **Building Report: 3-D Vision**

Our hands and feet have never stunk so badly in our lives, yet our smiles remain intact, and the only tears that fall are due to insane amounts of laughter. That could only mean one thing... it must be waddle and daub season! That means we are now adding to our mixes a little more clay, shorter lengths of straw (which is much easier on our hands), and everyone's new favorite ingredient: cow poop! Usually, some of the local cattle ranchers will leave their cows overnight in a corral for us so that their excrement all collects in one area. They then shovel it into large sacks for us to pick up in the morning before building. Occasionally, we even have the rare opportunity to accept and complete the covert mission of raiding the corrals and secretly shoveling the doo-doo ourselves. It is then back to the worksite so that we can stomp it into a nice mixture with our feet, shape clumps of the mixture into bricks, and then work those bricks by hand into the woven bamboo walls on the front of the new structure. With the waddle and daub walls being much thinner than the bedroom walls, we can see an unbelievable amount of progress in a single workday. The mental vision and two-dimensional sketch on paper are shaping into an incredible three-dimensional reality.

Meanwhile, the new shower and composting toilet area is looking fantastic. Roger's expertise in the world of lime led the way through the plastering and lime-washing of the area. The walls are a rustic orange and are highlighted by two green snakes, all very natural earthy tones. After seven coats of lime (plaster and wash) over several weeks, we are very content with the results.

It seems like so much has been coming together within the past month or so. Robin has even more to smile about as Roger and Timo finished building her a new workbench. The finished project is well beyond professional quality, prompting Robin to say "(gasp) it's absolutely beautiful. I'm going to feel awful when the first piece of metal burns a small hole in it." Little did she know that the prior knowledge of this occurrence was worked into the design; it will only make it look more like a fine piece of antique furniture.

Brian O'Rourke

### **Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Anything for Love**

"I would do anything for love, but I won't do that" ---Meatloaf

That? What might "that" be? Those familiar with the physical appearance of this fine singer might conclude that "that" would have to be something completely outrageous as the light of love rarely shines into the dark recesses of Meatloafian men. Eat tempeh? Reveal his man-breasts? Munch scat? What won't he do for love?

Everyone has his or her opinion, and frankly it hardly matters the answer to this riddle as much as it matters that the folks here at Rancho Mastatal have the time and pace of life to debate such queries. People come here for all sorts of reasons but all instantly find their inner clock slowed down a tick.

Suddenly, in the absence of too much stress and hustle, some extremely interesting interactions begin to blossom.

Whilst stacking caca-filled cob blocks on the side wall of Tim and Robin's future home, participants decided to rename themselves "poop names." S!@\*brick One and Two, Scat Boy, and Squirts were just some of their creative genius. Laughter served as much to soothe their souls as it did their noses on that fine afternoon. And the house is looking great.

The giant group of volunteers (including a number of extremely handsome gents) has recently been dwindling. Goodbye to Noah, Kelly, John, Colin (Poop), Maggie, Ashley, Marissa (where'd ya go?), and anyone else I may be forgetting. We are enjoying a fairly laid-back week in anticipation of the arrival of a group from The U of Vermont this Sunday. There has been an air of boys versus girls at the Rancho as the men recently have been growing extremely light in their loafers. Despite their fairy, er airiness, the men managed to clobber the girls last night in a game of Cranium.

In summary, things at the ranch are flowing smoothly and we are all thankful to be in this environment with the fine folks of Mastatal. It is such a nice balance of Ultimate Frisbee, work, extravagant meals, projects, games, river trips, flaming flatulence, the "Pulperia", stinky bodies, more extravagant meals, an Imperial, some yoga, meditation, a distasteful conversation or two, the waterfalls, a spiritual debate or two, and a nice quiet session in the composting toilet that God is surely smiling down on this place. And the women of Costa Rica are all smiling at Roger who is sporting his first-ever trimmed and shaped beard (he's taken, ladies!!).

Ryan Ferester

### **Community Facts/Stories: The Rockin' Salon Comunal**

In April's newsletter, this section contained the following quote: "that massive concrete structure that we love joking about blowing up has finally started to win us over." At the time, Susan, her UW students, and local elementary and high school students were painting murals on the walls throughout the inside of the Salón Comunal de Mastatal (a.k.a. the community center). An extraordinary amount of work done by countless hands over the past few weeks has enhanced their work towards the beautification of a once lackluster building.

The latest project has been improving the entrance to the building. The first step was accepting the generous donation of a bunch of teak poles from a local teak farmer named Edemar Bolaños. Teak is a readily available, durable and relatively inexpensive wood in our area (and yes, it is not native). A stronger core grows within a softer layer of wood, and the denser, harder core then grows outward (making them extremely heavy). After these poles were cut and skinned, someone needed to carry them out of the jungle. The first crew of people to tackle the transporting the teak task included Chepo, Timo, Roger, Colin, Levi, Ryan, and myself. After parking the red truck, we trekked down a hilly and very muddy road to the property with the poles. The first one that we decided to move took all seven of us. We lifted (with our legs not our backs) the most gargantuan of donated teak onto our shoulders. The weight shifted on every turn, slope, divot, and mud-pit as we slowly hauled it back to our parking spot a half-hour away. Thinking the smaller poles would be much easier, we split into smaller teams. The load seemed to have multiplied, but we all marched

on... sweating, grunting, and even singing songs while pretending to be strong men. Seven people, four hours, seven poles (a little more than half) moved to the community center. The rest would be moved later by the usual suspects, downsized.

Gilbert Vindas, who does some amazing work here at the Ranch, then led the way at the community center. With Chepo at his side, he managed the deconstruction of the old entrance and the assembly of the new one. This work included a new foundation for the teak poles (with a concrete base), putting the poles in place, creating a frame for the roof, and then nailing each piece of the metal roof in its proper spot. This process took a few days, and Gilbert did receive some help from a few locals and some hands from the Rancho.

This all occurred in preparation for the Mother's Day dance that Mastatal just recently hosted. The building was already looking much better, but there was much more work left to do in hopes of a successful event. The community really came together in an impressive effort to make everything happen.

The UVM students (see above) did a wonderful job cleaning the center and just helping with anything that needed it. The students, volunteers (Ryan, Michelle, Erin, Carey, Brian, and Roger), Timo and Robin, and a large portion of the community all did their part Friday evening and Saturday morning. A few of the local guys killed a giant pig for the pork roast (while many of us watched with mixed reactions). An enormous tamale production line soon materialized with people heating big leaves over a fire to make them flexible, making the actual tamale, wrapping the tamale in the leaves, stoking the fire for a large pot of boiling water, and boiling the wrapped tamale. In the kitchen, Robin, Lili, Kattia, Mireya, Lidiet, Mariana, and Maritza would be busy selling these tamales and the rest of the food that they were cooking throughout the weekend. The bar stayed busy as well while Roger, Caraca, Junior, Pichy, and Alex were cracking open visitors' Imperials and pouring Guaro, giving Seco the break he needed to sport his bling-bling. The students and volunteers also made a huge difference in the presentation of everything by hanging some gorgeous flowers on braided grasses throughout the building and around the teak poles. This all made for the most aesthetically pleasing dance the Salon Comunal has ever seen, all thanks to some true community effort.

The mood at the dance was a happy one. It seemed like a non-stop flow of people was streaming through the building all night, and nobody could help but get a little funky on the dance floor to the pumpin' beats of Discomovil Zeus (the hired DJ). All in all, the sports committee (who sponsored the event) was able to profit \$423. This money will be used to purchase new jerseys for the soccer team and to improve the town's soccer field. We're also hoping that maybe it will be used to buy the odd broom, a few new cutting boards, and some new knives for future events so that ours no longer crumble on pork bones like weak teeth biting into a large diamond. In any case, it really is great to see so many people getting involved with so many different pieces of the interlocking puzzle that make up this type of event, and to see it come together and run so smoothly and successfully. COMMUNITY center indeed.

Brian O'Rourke

## **Comida Corner: Creamy Italian Dressing**

Are Cobra and Downward Dog making your tummy growl? Are you ready to treat that animal within who is just begging for some healthy food for the body and mind? Toss yourself a fresh salad or even cook up some pasta, and mix in the wisdom that we found in *The Yoga Cookbook* (from *The Sivanda Yoga Vedanta Centers*).

Ingredients: ½ cup white beans, cooked (or try chick-peas)

6 tbsp olive oil

1 tsp dried oregano

Pinch of dried dillweed

3 tbsp lemon juice

1 tsp salt

½ tsp pepper

1. Put the white beans in a food processor or blender and blend until smooth.
2. Add all the remaining ingredients and blend again until smooth.
3. If necessary, thin with water or more oil to the desired consistency.
4. Chill before serving.

Buen provecho!

## **Inspirational Impressions: Real Success**

“To laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children, to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends, to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others, to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch... to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded!”

-Emerson

That’s all for now (deep breath). See ya next time.

Abrazos,

Tim, Robin, Brian, Ryan, Roger and the Crew