

Rancho Mastatal Updates

August 2006

For many of you it's "Back to School" or "Back to Work" time. For us September marks the "end" of our season in Mastatal. Even though the Ranch remains open and fairly active year-round, September, except for last year, October, and November generally mark our three slowest months. There are a few reasons why this is the case. For one, it's the rainiest time of year in Mastatal. The roads can get pretty trashed and life in general in our little town slows down to a snail's pace. Some would argue that it never surpasses the pace of our little furry friends, but hey, it's all relative. Secondly, October and November are the two months that we generally spend time in the United States visiting our friends and family and recharging for the upcoming season. We keep our quantity of guests down to a more manageable number as we prefer to get to know everyone that comes to the Ranch and would rather that nobody arrives while we are away. Lastly, most folks from the US and other countries are just beginning their academic year and/or wrapping up summertime activities. This results in less travel to places such as Costa Rica.



Lily scraping wood with a machete

photo by Alan Smith

Fortunately, as in years past, we will have a capable crew at the Ranch's helm while we are gone. We will have a core group of about ten people during the months of October and November. There will be only one group arriving while we are gone, our yearly visit from Villanova University, though for the rest of the time there will be plenty to keep NATE, KATIE, BRUCE, ANA, PHOEBE, STEPHEN, AMBER, KORI, TYLER, KELLEN, ASHLEY and maybe a few others busy. It seems as if all of those that will be at the Ranch have an honest desire to get their hands dirty and get their minds and bodies into projects while in Mastatal. It's always been people such as this that make the Ranch what it is. Our first group from the University of Washington Honor's Program highlighted August. The ten female students worked on various projects throughout the community and in our forests. Thanks to TIBURON and ANN for a wonderful visit. That was our final group until October. The Ranch should be a relatively quiet place between now and our departure, so we're looking forward to have plenty of time to work on furniture, build, and get the place ready for our time away. And then we'll be looking forward to see some of you while we're in the States.

So, without further ado, enjoy this month's edition.

This month's update includes:

RM Program News: Upcoming Wilderness First Responder Course

Conservation Update: Environmental Problems Back on the Rise

Building Report: Timber Framing in Mastatal

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Changing the Face of Mastatal Sporting

Community Facts/Stories: New Floor at the Community Center

Comida Corner: Calzones

Fútbol Follies: Approaching the Doldrums

Inspirational Impressions: Twain



Medical Clinic Volunteer Staff

RM Program News:Upcoming Wilderness First Responder Course

Although still a few months away, we wanted to bring you up to speed on next year's Wilderness First Responder Course being held January 7 through January 17. This amazing class has had a growing following over the years and has attracted a wonderfully diverse and marvelous mix of people. DAVE MCEVOY, the founder and director of Aerie School for Backcountry Medicine, has led this annual course since 2004 and as always we're looking forward to see him and his family back in Mastatal soon after the New Year.

Even though last year's course was offered in both English and Spanish, we've been looking for ways to run separate classes for English speakers and Spanish speakers. Our timing has been a bit off in the past as most Costa Rican guides are too busy to take a WFR course in January or March, the two months that we have offered it in the past, as this time of year marks the high season down here. There's certainly been some genuine interest, but for a variety of reasons, we have not been able to pull it off.

The yearly WFR that Aerie offers each year at the Ranch is, as I always say to Dave, one of our favorite groups of the entire year. It never fails to bring together a fabulous group of folks interested in the outdoors and the health of our world and its inhabitants. The coursework is fascinating and important, and Dave's teaching style is first-class. If you or anyone you know is in need of getting certified or recertified in Wilderness First Response, please let Dave, *dave [at]aerimed.com*, or me know and we can get you some information and/or get you signed up. You can also learn more about Dave and his organization at <http://www.aerimed.com>.

Conservation Update: Environmental Problems Back on the Rise

Just when you think things are getting better, they get worse. Isn't that the way it so often is. After a marked decrease in the illegal cutting of trees, the poaching of rainforest animals, and the contamination of our rivers over the past year, it seems that all three are back on the rise again. We have been hearing more and more hunting dogs and chainsaws in the forest and more signs of people poisoning our rivers for the harvest of freshwater shrimp.

The La Cangreja National Park guards seemed to be deterring some of these activities over the past year though it appears that recently they're turning a blind eye and deaf ear to these atrocities. I must admit that they are in an extremely tough situation. They do not want to be looked at as the bad guys in town as they have to live here just like the rest of us. They have also received threats in the past months for cracking down on some of the abovementioned problems. Being a park guard can at times be a thankless job. People in our region generally have a pretty independent attitude and would rather have the government stay out of their business.



View of the hills of La Cangreja National Park

photo by Desa

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Well, days after writing the above paragraph, I awoke on a Sunday morning to the sound of hunting dogs behind the "choza". It was a bit before 5 a.m. when my brain began to work its way into frenzy about what to do about illegal hunting on our property and in the national park. I contemplated getting my boots on and walking down to see what I could find. I got up, used the bank, and then lied down again, unable to sleep. I finished a book that I had been reading and still unable to rest, I walked over to the main house and decided that writing a letter to the Director of our regional MINAE (Ministry of the Environment) office outlining my complaints would put my mind at ease a bit. As I was wrapping up the letter, now around 7 a.m., I heard a truck speed up and stop in front of the bus stop, a door slam, and then a voice yelling for Chepo. I ran out to see what was going on. It was a MINAE truck, filled with three park guards, a park volunteer, and the local policeman. I noticed that the volunteer had a rifle on his lap. As I approached the car, Leo, the head of our local MINAE office, ran over to me to ask for my permission to enter our property to search for the hunting dogs that they had heard all the way at their house. I immediately gave them consent and then went and put on some sneakers and grabbed a machete to join them. I was a few minutes behind them. About 15 minutes down the main trail to the waterfall, I heard gunshots. Five in all. I continued down the path and approximately three minutes later heard another shot. I moved a bit slower not wanting to surprise the shooter. As I approached the Quebrada Grande some minutes later, I met up with Chepo, the volunteer whose name I learned was Angelo, and Leo, the leader of the park guards. Chepo and Angelo were carrying a dead dog hanging from a pole and tied at its feet. I relieved a sweating Angelo and proceeded to carry the dog with Chepo, and then with Angelo who relieved Chepo halfway up the trail, up to the main house, having to avoid the dog's kisses a number of times as we bounced up the trail. It all seemed a bit surreal, looking at the dead dog's bloody face as an amalgam of thoughts rushed around in my head. I was thankful that

MINAE had done their job on one hand, but was also sad that this dog had to die for something that he was bred and taught to do. It of course begs the question, who's life is more important? A rainforest animal native to this area, or a local hunting dog? This lifeless creature that I was staring at had probably helped kill dozens or even hundreds of rainforest animals, some in danger of extinction, during his career. But should he be the one paying the ultimate price for something that he instinctively had to do? Certainly somewhat complex issues without cut and clear rules.

After arriving back to the main house we dropped the dog into the back of the MINAE pickup truck for its eventual trip to its subterranean abode. I was nervously looking around to see if anyone was watching. Poaching is an extremely delicate issue in our community and the people are divided into two camps, those that tolerate illegal hunting, and those that look down on it. Well, as always happens in such a small village, the word about the shooting spread quickly throughout town. We came to find out that the dead dog was owned by Victor, a local man with a reputation for hunting, even back when he was the local policeman. He was understandably livid, as hound dogs such as the one that died are worth as much as \$750, an enormous amount of money for just about anyone in Mastatal. Victor proceeded to threaten MINAE with promises to bring them to. Talk about the dog dominated local gossip for days. Now everything seems to have settled back down a bit. What will result from this occurrence, both in the short-term and in the long-term, remains to be seen. In the very least, I hope that it has sent a clear message to the other poachers in the area and that the death of this dog will save the lives of both other hounds and the animals that have roamed our forests for thousands of years.

And as I finish this section, I can hear hounds howling in the distance.

Building Report: Timber Framing in Mastatal

For many years now we have been interested in the idea of timber framing and the beautiful, durable shelters that this technique can provide. Unfortunately we've never had enough know-how or experience to move ahead and build something using this old and proven method. This will hopefully all change early next year. A few things still have to happen to make it all possible, but we're hoping to build a small structure during next year's annual Yestermorrow course at the Ranch. Over the past few years we've had a number of timber framers spend time at the Ranch. With all of them we've talked about the possibility of adding a timber frame structure to the building repertoire here. SKIP DEWHIRST, who instructs our yearly natural building course with his wife LIZABETH MONIZ, is one of these timber framers. We're going to try and work out the design and logistics for the March 2007 course while we're visiting friends and family in the United States this October and November. One of the biggest challenges will be to get the necessary tools to Mastatal. Building a timber frame structure demands the use of some pretty specific and sometimes bulky instruments that we currently don't have in



Evening at the Workshop

photo by David Katz

our collection. It's possible that we'll decide that it's just too much to try and pull off this year, which would result in pushing it back until 2008, but we're determined, one way or another, to see a timber frame structure in our midst in the near future. We've started collecting some of the implements and resources, and have identified a source of tropical pine that might do the job for a small structure. Keep your fingers crossed as we work to assemble the necessary supplies and in the meantime we'll certainly keep you posted on any progress we make.

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Changing the Face of Mastatal Sporting

After a long day in the workshop, nothing beats a little sweatiness. While the mainstay of fútbol is always enticing, the days of *mejengas* and *mete-cincos* are slowly drowning in the ever-growing piscina that is the Mastatal plaza. Certainly, on any given afternoon you're bound to find some hardcore ballers trying to decide between muddy tacos or thorny feet, with more folks joining in during the recent spurt of verano. Yet with the rainiest months on the horizon, those seeking recreation may have to get their feet wet elsewhere.

Upon the recent completion of the salón floor (see below), basketball is quickly on the rise, its popularity soaring among mastatalenos young and old. No longer will it be a battle in the gravel, but rather a squeaky smooth sweatfest. Granted, the usual obstacles remain, and the lane has yet to be painted, but all the materials for a second hoop have arrived, meaning full court games in the imminent future. It's great to see folks getting into it, at all hours of the day (sometimes I wonder if the middle school kids actually go to class). With a little direction and coaching we could foreseeably put together a weekly clinic or league. Saturday Hoopsters anyone?

As much as some of us enjoy smelling like wet socks, every once in a while we need a break from the hot and heavy physical sporting sessions. How to still achieve afternoon gaming you ask? In comes the fastest growing leisure activity in Mastatal. Indeed, one of the sweetest sounds around is the cling and clang of metal on metal. Here in ticolandia they're known as herraduras, but most of us know them as horseshoes. Now I've only thrown shoes in a couple different venues in my life, but I dare say the Choza pit is possibly the best you could ask for. With Cangreja looming by your side, the energy is dynamic, and if you don't have Widespread Panic booming off the front porch, the birds'll do just fine. Nowadays the grounds crew is pretty much on top of keeping the pits in good condition, trucking in fresh sand when necessary, maintaining the 14° forward tilt on the posts, and leveling the throwing circles. Both pits have been boxed out, and spectator seating has been established. There have been some barnburners out there already, with sparks flying on a number of occasions. Ringers are almost guaranteed every game, even from first-time shoe throwers. So if you're looking for some hardcore anaerobic gaming, come on down and hit the pit.

Community Facts/Stories: New Floor at the Community Center

Thanks to the Mastate Charitable Foundation (MCF), the Asociación de Desarrollo Integral de Mastatal, and many local and Ranch volunteers, our ever more palatable community center now has a new, smooth, finished floor. MCF funded this important project while the Asociación and the Ranch provided the moral fiber and sweat to get the work done.

The floor has already seen plenty of action and was ready just in time for the town's last "baile", organized by la Asociación. Mostly the new floor has resulted in a huge increase in the amount of hoops being played in the community center. It's been a fresh outlet on those rainy afternoon days

when the soccer field turns into the community pool and it's splendid not having to worry about tearing open your body every time you find yourself falling towards the ground or to wonder in what direction the ball will bounce each time that you put in on the floor. The unsullied surface will also allow for games of papifútbol (indoor soccer) and will make a nicer place to study for the middle school students who use it for this purpose during the week. A second backboard (thanks to A SMITH and ELYSSA for the new rim) that will allow full-court basketball games is currently under construction and there's even been talk about tennis in the future. Tennis anyone? It's difficult to foresee all of the positive changes that this new floor will be responsible for. A monster thank you to everyone that had something to do with this project, especially to GILBERTH VINDAS for heading up the installation and to everyone out there that made a donation to MCF in 2006.

Comida Corner: Calzones

The recipe for the dough comes from Didi Emmon's book *The Vegetarian Planet*. We will let you come up with your favorite yummy fillings, the possibilities are endless. This is quick and easy and can also be used for pizza.

- 2/3 cup lukewarm water (110 degrees Fahrenheit)
- 1 pinch sugar (or honey)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 cups unbleached white flour, plus a bit more, as needed
- 1 teaspoon salt



Loading the earthen-cob oven with homemade, yeasty, vegetarian pizza. Oh my...

1. To make the dough by hand, stir together 1/3 cup water and the sugar in a large bowl. Sprinkle the yeast over this mixture, and let it stand until it is foamy, about 10 minutes. Stir in the remaining 1/3 cup water, the olive oil, the 2 cups flour, and the salt. Blend with a large spoon until the contents form a dough. Knead the dough on a floured surface, incorporating more flour, if necessary, to keep the dough from sticking. Knead the dough until smooth and elastic, about 5 to 10 minutes.
2. To make the dough in a food processor with a plastic dough blade or in a heavy-duty mixer, proof the yeast as described, but use a small bowl. Then combine the yeast mixture with the olive oil, 2 cups flour, and salt in the food processor or mixer. If you are using a food processor, run it until the mixture forms a ball, adding more water or flour by the tablespoon. If the dough is too dry or wet. Process for 15 seconds more. If you are using a mixer, use the hook attachment, and mix the dough on the lowest speed until a ball is formed, adding a bit of water or flour as necessary. Knead the dough in the mixer for 5 minutes.
3. Put the dough into a deep, oiled bowl, and turn it to coat it with the oil. Let the dough rise, covered with plastic wrap (or a towel), in a warm place for 1 hour or until it is doubled in bulk. Punch down the dough, and form it into four balls.
4. Preheat the oven to 450 Fahrenheit. On a floured work surface, roll out each ball of dough to an 8-inch round. Put half of the filling into the middle of one round. Fill the other rounds of dough the same way. Moisten the edge of each round with water, and fold the calzone over, pressing with your fingers to seal the calzone over, pressing with your fingers to seal the calzone tight. Place the

calzones on a baking sheet sprinkled with cornmeal or greased.

5. Bake the calzones for 15 minutes, or until they are golden brown. Serve them hot with extra sauce and cheese.

Happy Bakin' and Buen Provecho

Inspirational Impressions

Dance like nobody's watching;

Love like you've never been hurt.

Sing like nobody's listening

Live like it's heaven on earth.

--Mark Twain

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew