

# Rancho Mastatal Updates

---

## May 2006

*It's been a bit quieter than normal around the Ranch since Susan and her crew left Mastatal at the beginning of June. We must admit that's it's been a nice respite from the high level of activity that's generally the norm around here. Nevertheless the houses are slowly filling back up with volunteers and guests as we prepare for the mini-high season that the North American summer brings to Costa Rica.*

*We've had a number of familiar faces pass through our doors over the past many weeks including our good friend RICK BAILEY from Seattle and his sailing partner and friend COURTNEY. Rick has been navigating the high seas in his 37' sailboat "Guava Jelly" for the past two years. He started in the Emerald City and is currently anchored off of Playa de Coco here in Costa Rica. It was fabulous seeing Rick again and meeting and getting to know Courtney. We hope to bump back into them before they make their way towards South America. We've also recently had the pleasure to spend some time with some other Seattle friends. NANCY SIMCOX, RON MATYJAS and their beautiful daughter STASHIA visited us for a few weeks in June. While in Costa Rica they rode horses, visited waterfalls, milked cows, went to Manuel Antonio National Park, hiked in the rainforest and just about everything else possible to do in such a short time. It was Stashia's first trip to the rainforest. She did wonderfully while making some new friends with the kids of our region. It was awesome getting to spend some good quality time with them. LINDA RAVEN and DANA MICHALOWSKI, both past visitors with different groups a few years ago, recently came back for relatively short stays in Mastatal too. It's heartwarming to see so many familiar faces returning to our community each year and reinforces what it is that we're trying to pull off here. This upcoming winter is almost entirely booked with old friends who seem to be making Mastatal their winter getaway. This is something that's extraordinarily special for Robin and I and the rest of the community.*

*Without further ado, here's our May Newsletter. Yeah, I know, extremely late once again. Where are you SPARKLES? Enjoy!!*



*Alan Smith created & executed this beautiful mosaic from fragments of broken pottery during his winter-spring visit to Rancho  
photo by Maxine Chapman*

This month's update includes:

**RM Program News:** Cultural Connections with Center High School

**Conservation Update:** Developing a Disease

**Building Report:** Furniture, Small and Big, Always Rustic

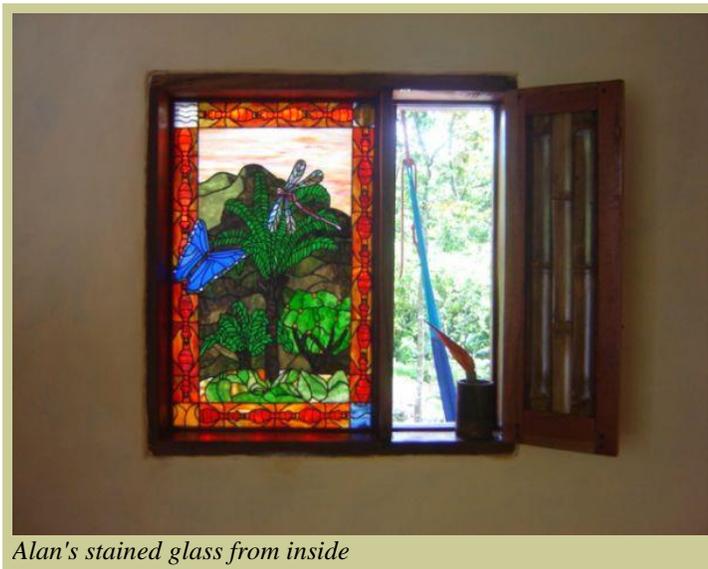
**Volunteer/Guest Gossip:** Volunteer Praise

**Community Facts/Stories:** Hoops

**Comida Corner:** Hearty Korean Pancakes

**Fútbol Follies:** A May Mudslide for Mastatal

**Inspirational Impressions:** Uncle Abe



*Alan's stained glass from inside*

### **RM Program News: Cultural Connections with Center High School**

We're anticipating the arrival of yet another group from the Center High School in Seattle, WA this coming July. Tom McDonald and the Ranch have been working together now for over three years with this progressive high school. Cultural Connections is the brainchild of Tom and some motivated Center High students who decided that there was a wonderful opportunity here in Mastatal for young adults to learn about the world, another culture, and sustainability. The program has blossomed and we hope to continue to nurture it for many years into the future. Drop Tom a

line at [tae2000@hotmail.com](mailto:tae2000@hotmail.com) if you'd like to learn more.

### **Conservation Update: Developing a Disease**

Getting up with the sun, we loaded ourselves into the gray truck and pulled out of the gate for another mission to the coast. With the recent heavy rains, we opted for an uncharted route, heading for La Gloria and the Tulin road. After weeks of prying and municipality meetings, the stretch of road from Mastatal to Santa Rosa had been recently leveled and widened, in some places resembling a four-lane highway. Yet in the past week Arcelio was spotted driving the bus in reverse up the hill from the Cruce in order to park halfway to town, where he was met by another bus headed back to Mastatal. So much for defying nature.



*One of the murals at the community center*

*photo by Joel Green*

Within forty minutes we were descending from La Gloria into the Rio Tulin valley, rolling past the rundown bullring of the tiny pueblo of Montelimar. My mind quickly got to wondering what it takes for a place to get put on the map. Surely, it's not easy for sleepy towns like Mastatal and Montelimar, but if a bullring and a basketball hoop can't do it for rural Costa Rica then I don't know what can.

Signs of our proximity to the coast began to show around the village of Mata el Platano, which surprisingly sported one swanky, tiled out bar with a big screen TV, amidst basic homes of wood and concrete. Minutes later, a group of gringos on ATVs came ripping around the corner, one with a look of anxious bewilderment on his face. Apart from these two sightings, everywhere else we looked this town was as basic and rural as its name suggested.

Before we knew it we were out of the muddy potholes and ripping 80 km/hr on the Costanera, trying to sneak a glimpse of the sea through the billboards advertising the Mango Beach Resort and Hotel. (With one every 50 yards it was hard not to catch the name.) No time to stop for a quote on a new suite – we were eager to get right down to business. Our new route proved to cut the trip by over 20 minutes, and we were cruising the strip by seven. On the way in we were having a hard time keeping track of all the construction projects underway, let alone trying to figure out what the building inspectors must get paid to approve all the necessary permits.

Back in Zapaton, obtaining legal title over one's own land to apply for low-income pre-fab housing from the government isn't as easy as picking up some rice at your neighbor's house. Here in Jaco, the "largest and most rapidly expanding commercial and vacation destination in Costa Rica," one can only assume those kinds of 'negocios' move along a little more readily. As we gazed up at some of these veritable coastline skyscrapers, I reflected on how the profits would be partitioned. Would anything get filtered into the Instituto de Desarrollo Agraria (Rural Development Agency)? Or does it all just go back into the Beatle Bars and Planet Jacos of the country? Alas, with close to zero actual knowledge or evidence on the matter, I am for now left without a clue.

Weaving through the streets after dark, one can't make it more than half a block without being offered some kind of promotion. Tequila two-for twos, tonight only. Yeah, right. "Wow, everything just seems to come together in one breath," remarks Timo as we pass a few local characters on the bridge. But is Jaco gringolandia gone wrong, or is Costa Rica better off for it in the end? Indeed, the steady stream of foreign investment feeds the country's number one industry and provides a large number of jobs for locals and out-of-towners. Mastatal and San Miguel are currently experiencing a significant exodus, among young males in particular, to the coast in search of employment. Some come back on weekends, others stay away for months at a time, while many can only sit at home and imagine life 'afuera.' Just like in any country, leaving the boonies for the coast or the big city can result in a number of outcomes, for better or worse. As for us, we could only push our threshold for being away from Mastatal so far, and we were beginning to feel all the deals and solicitations scratch at our souls.

Riding up through Montelimar to La Gloria at sundown, we were thankfully back where you don't have to check both ways before you cross the street. Back where life truly comes at you in 'tico time.' Back to a place with more horses than streetlights, where word of mouth travels faster than

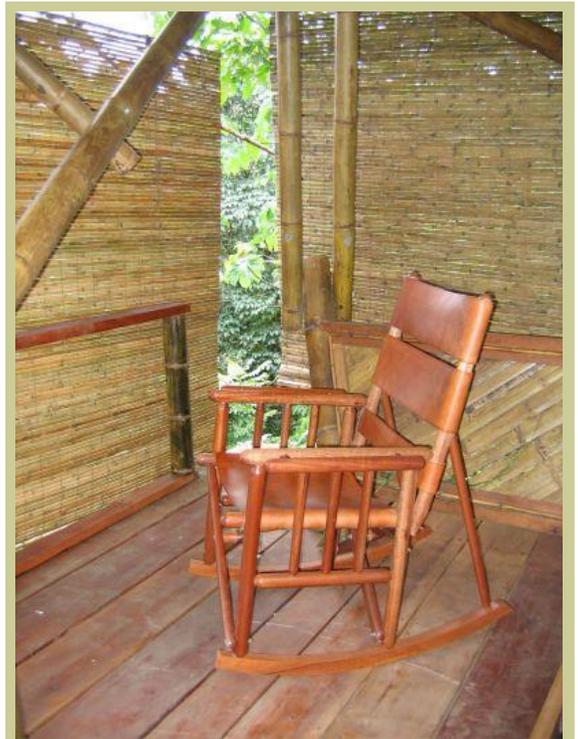
the hardest hit soccer ball. We were now back to juggling work around the Mundial, taking advantage of our time in the cantina to discuss possible scenarios in our own campeonato.

While Mastatal has evolved over the past few years, adding a new community center, a new pulperia, 2 biodigesters, a middle school, several babies, and a growing number of motorbikes, the rate of “development” has remained typically campesino. Just in case the reality of rural living has escaped us, we’re periodically issued reminders by a mountain spring water outage due to community sharing or a faulty pipeline. Most of the time, though, people are too engrossed in conversation, cooking up a mean pinto, or throwing back a few beers to notice how utterly simple life is out here. For those who’ve had the fortune of seeing the likes of Jaco Beach, this may be as complicated as they want to get.

### **Building Report: Furniture, Small and Big, Always Rustic**

Building furniture is one of those tasks that never loses its place on the project list board. As we continue to add more arrows to the infrastructure quiver, the list of needed furnishings keeps getting longer and longer. At times the workshop gets pretty damn busy with numerous people working on their various masterpieces, from small stools to desks to beds. There’s always space for another bookshelf, and with three major building projects taking place all at once these days, the "choza", the Hankey and the classroom, we may want to consider expanding our workshop with all of the upcoming projects. We have quite a few tools nowadays though few of the bigger, fancier ones that one may find in a well-equipped furniture workshop. That, coupled with the fact that all of our wood is milled locally with chainsaws and Alaskan mills, means that our furniture, albeit always beautiful, is what one might define as “rustic”. Chainsaw marks characterize all of our pieces,

as they should in this less than refined environment in which we live. There’s something powerful about making and then using a piece of furniture that you built with your own two hands. With a few straightforward joints, some patience, a bit of creativity, and some good tools, just about anyone can make themselves a masterpiece.



*A fine piece of Mastatal's handmade furniture*



*A group of Mastatal volunteers relax & cool off by the river*

### **Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Volunteer Praise**

This place would be so much less without our volunteers. You are without a doubt the muscles and so often the heart and soul too of the Ranch. A heartfelt thanks to everyone out there that has contributed to this amazing project over the last 4 ½ years. We love you.

### **Community Facts/Stories: Hoops**

With the help of our friend RICK BAILEY, we replaced 3 lights at the “salón communal” and now have luminosity for night games of one our favorite games, basketball. The court is still cracked and covered with small rocks and mini-potholes. They undoubtedly add a new twist to the game that I have played for so many years. Dribbling around a defender and then avoiding the many potholes helps you get in an extra and sometimes unexpected workout if you aren’t used to playing in this unique environment. We have one hoop on the north side of the court with nothing at this point on the other end. We play games of half-court two-on-two or sometimes one-on-one or three-on-three depending on how many people we can coerce into playing. Timo and I are constantly having to hassle people to come and play a quick game of hoops. Being inside this concrete building while running around in these tropical surroundings gives the same effect as a sauna does and makes for some incredibly sweaty battles on the court. Our sports ground is also built a little differently. The three-point shot on this court is a little bit trickier than the long-range shots that you see in the NBA. On each side of our hoop there are trusses that come across the court and connect to the other side of the building. To make a basket from here you have to shoot the ball over the bottom of the truss and under the top part of the truss. Not easy. After a month of playing here in these conditions you will be ready for anything back home. The next phase of readying the “salón communal” for further action will be pouring concrete on the floor so that we have a flat surface to use. Imagine that. A flat surface to play basketball on. Who would ever have thought? Thanks to the Mastate Charitable Foundation for putting up some funds to make the floor project a reality.

For any basketball players or hackers out there that wants to join in on the games down here we need YOU because we have some real slackers down here at the moment that never want to play. Where’s A SMITH when you need him. One a positive note more and more “ticos” are joining in on the games and learning how to play. To wrap this up I’d like to mention that we are also looking for a second rim to make it down here so that we can play some full-court games. So if you want to help out and don’t mind carrying a 20-pound basketball rim through the airport it would be greatly appreciated. A tournament was in the works involving teams made up of a “tico” and a gringo but

has yet to happen. When it does the winner will be announced.

*Mateo Stone*

### **Comida Corner:** Hearty Korean Pancakes

These filling little gems come to us from the *Vegetarian Planet*, by Didi Emmons. We don't hesitate to substitute other veggies such as grated zucchini, sweet potatoes, chopped spinach, chopped cilantro or parsley, or grated squash. Whatever you have on hand!

#### **Pancakes:**

- 1 egg
- 1 1/3 cups water
- 1 cup unbleached white flour
- 1 cup glutinous rice flour (available in Asian markets and many supermarkets, or you can grind your own), or an additional 1 cup white flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup cooked short-grain brown rice, or 1 cup glutinous (sweet) rice (available in Asian markets)
- 8 ounces firm tofu, cut into 1/2 inch cubes (optional)
- 2 large carrots, grated
- 6 scallions, both green and white parts, chopped fine
- 3 tablespoons canola or corn oil

#### **Dipping Sauce:**

- 3 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 teaspoon dark sesame oil
- 1 teaspoon apple cider vinegar
- 1 pinch chile flakes, or 1 dash hot chile sauce
- 1 pinch sugar or honey

1. Make the pancake batter. In a small bowl, whisk together the egg and water. In a large bowl, stir together the flours and salt. Make a well in the center of the flour mixture, and add the egg-water mixture. Stirring slowly with a whisk, gradually incorporate the flour into the liquid. Stir until the batter is smooth. Add the cooked rice, tofu, carrots, and scallions to the batter, and stir well. Set the bowl aside.

2. Make the dipping sauce. In a small bowl, whisk together all of the sauce ingredients except the sugar. Taste the sauce, and add a pinch of sugar, if you'd like.

3. In a well-seasoned skillet at least 10 inches in diameter (do not use a non-stick pan as the texture of the cakes would be quite different) heat 1-tablespoon oil over medium heat. Pour 1 generous cup



*Just outside your bedroom window*

*photo by Joel Green*

of the batter into the middle of the pan. Turn the heat to medium-low and spread the pancake with a spoon. Cook the pancake for about 5 minutes, or until it is lightly browned on the bottom. Turn the pancake with a spatula and lightly brown the other side for 5 minutes. Slide the pancake onto a plate. Keep the pancake warm in a slow oven while you make two more in the same way, using 1-tablespoon oil for each.

4. Pour the dipping sauce into small individual bowls and serve the sauce with the hot pancakes.

**Variation:** For a wonderful texture and flavor, add 3 tablespoons toasted sesame seeds to the batter. We also love to serve this with bok choy sautéed with garlic and ginger.

*!Gracias a la madre y buen provecho!*

### **F?tbol Follies: A May Mudslide for Mastatal**

Coming off the humiliation of their performance against Guarumal, Los Galacticos were looking for redemption in the month of May. With only San Miguel left to be played in the first of two opening rounds, Mastatal had scouted out most of the competition and knew what was at stake in the coming weeks. Carrying high hopes of rediscovering their splendor of the first three weeks, Los Amarillos looked to take advantage of a friendly tournament in La Gloria to sharpen their skills.

A yearly tradition, the Gloria “campeonato” marked the opening of rainy season fútbol for the greater metropolitan area of Pursical/Parrita. With over a dozen teams hailing from townships as small as Arenal and as large as Puris and Quepos, there would be no shortage of play, though competition would have to be regulated to 15 minute halves. Mastatal hit the field twice that day before the impending thunderstorm reduced play to penales. In their first match, Los Galacticos kept the pressure on, and nearly secured a victory when TYLER’s header caught post late in the second half. With no score at the end of regulation, the two teams went to PKs, which, thanks to the help of our visiting keeper from Zapatón, resulted in a Mastatal win (5-4). The yellow shirts lost their second match 0-1, but were poised for a third when the rains started to pour. The two teams decided their fate in penalitos, needing nearly 10 players from each team to end it. Unfortunately nerves got the best of some of Mastatal’s players, and they ended up losing 6-7. No one really got the final results of the day, as organization was typically tico, but a solid outing overall. At least an opportunity to practice for the following week’s match-up.

Heading to Tufares for the first time ever, Mastatal entered a must-win situation against San Miguel. That being said, there would be no cambios for Los Amarillos, and everyone would have to put in a solid effort for 90 minutes. They came out strong in the first half, brushing off an early penalty in the box against us and maintaining pressure. CARACA played well up front, assisting RONALD for the first goal and booming a rebound of his own free kick with his left foot into the back of the net for the second. Mastatal had several other close chances in the first half, but after 45 minutes the score remained tied at 2-2. They came out somewhat sluggish in the second half, as three defenders stood by and watched as “Puma” dribbled through them to score San Miguel’s third goal. Soon came the typical bickering and loose play that so often afflicts the galactic squad. Hope was momentarily restored late in the second half when TYLER scored off a cross close to the goal, but was just as quickly taken away by a questionable offsides call. As much as Mastatal tried they could not put another one away, and at the ref’s final whistle they ended up with another disappointing loss. These are the types of games that are fully within the yellow shirts’ reach, but

due to a certain lack of teamwork things often fall apart. Such was the trend in the second half of the first opening round, though Mastatal still clung to second place with 9 points.

With each team poised to start the second opening round in San Vicente, fútbol fanáticos were first privy to the UEFA Champions League final in Paris between Arsenal and Barcelona. Many awaited this championship with great excitement after having followed the late rounds over the past few months. Play was solid on both sides of the ball, with Arsenal striking first on a beautiful header. Yet with the expulsion of their star keeper for tackling Barca's striker just outside the box, Thierry Henry's squad lost a bit of their momentum. Indeed, two late second half goals gave the favored Barcelona the 2005-2006 trophy. With that, intense international play would be put on hold until early June and the you-know-what.

Kicking off the second opening round in San Vicente, all six teams came ready to put points on the scoreboard. The day's first match fell largely in favor of the home squad, as they seemingly roared past Zapatón for their first victory of the "campeonato". Continuing the lopsided trend of the day, Salitrales proved too strong for Los Galácticos, who put forth a less than valiant effort and came away with a 0-4 loss. Despite newcomer GIOVANNI in the backfield, Mastatal's defense looked sluggish, while the whole team seemed to be "faltando ganas," especially once the rains started. It was another shaky performance from MARCOS in net, who often found himself out of position at inopportune moments. A disappointing performance for Los Amarillos, who would have to step up their game if they wanted to classify for the final round. In a hard-fought third match of the day, San Miguel came up one goal short of a tie with frontrunner Guarumal. Nevertheless, Mastatal's longtime rival exhibited new signs of prowess which would surely make for a tighter "campeonato" in the weeks ahead.

The following Sunday Los Galácticos traveled back to Guarumal with a 15-man roster, including another local boyfriend secret weapon, MAURICIN. Given the recent debacle in goal, CARACA returned to "la puerta", fancy new tacos and all. He was looking good in warm-ups, raising hopes among his compas. Those hopes were rather quickly shot down by an early San Miguel goal, followed soon after by another which put the halftime score at 2-0 in favor of the blue and yellow jerseys. Mastatal's secret weapon played well and had a number of close shots on goal, yet with its recurring problems in the midfield, Los Galácticos ended up sulking off the field with a 1-4 loss. In other action, Guarumal squeaked out a 4-3 victory over Salitrales in a potential preview of final round play.

Alas, the month of May was less than successful for the Mastatal squad, though through some miraculous order of events it remained in second place and a close contender for the last three spots in the final four (Guarumal, as they say, "ya se fue.") Harnessing a little inspiration from El Mundial, they might just pull their weight in Junio. With that, be sure to stay tuned for the next momentous edition of the follies.

### **Inspirational Impressions: Uncle Abe**

*As a result of the war, corporations have now been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow...until all wealth is aggregated in a few hands, and the Republic is destroyed.*

Abraham Lincoln

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew