

Rancho Mastatal Updates

March 2006

Welcome to our March update, another pleasurable and inspiration-filled edition from the backwaters of Puriscal County. SUSAN and her group of industrious students from the UDub are dominating the scene these days as they diligently work towards fulfilling their credits for the spring quarter. It's a marvelous assembly of young adults and to date they've been a pure pleasure to have around. On a less positive note our recent weeks were lowlighted by a tearful goodbye as ROGER moved onwards from Mastatal. You'll find more about this in the context below. April has proven to be a transition month both in the

way of people and the weather. Periods of sun with an occasional hard rain. The migratory birds are making a temporary home in our town as they move north for the summer, the rivers are getting full again and hence the waterfalls more beautiful, and the trees are bursting with green. It's a wonderful month to be in Mastatal. GREG WATSON left our ranks recently after a fantabulous stay. He truly is a superhero and demonstrated this time and time again with his creativity and ability to get the job done. His wife KAREN decided to stay on for a couple of extra weeks and continues to operate the kitchen with boundless energy as well as being Robin's right hand lady on the limewashing at the "choza". She's been absolutely awesome to have with us. Greg and Karen have been threatening to return to Mastatal before the New Year. May they have a wonderful summer in Brooklin, ME and an adventurous fall in Europe. We were also blessed with another reasonably lengthy visit from Miss EMILY JUMP who unfortunately ran out of excuses to extend her stay any longer. Before leaving we talked to her about the possibility of doing some Ranch sitting come October and we're openly hoping that she's able to make it happen. With that said if there's anyone out there who's looking for a nice place to spend a few months this fall we're starting to think about beginning our search for folks to take care of the Ranch during our yearly visit to the States. Please drop us a line if you fall into this category. The next month or so should be a bit more settled than the months since the New Year. Susan's quarter abroad tends to bring some more regularity to our days and results in time to thoroughly get to know her students while delving deep into our projects. We're hoping to escape to the beach for a few days in May, something that we haven't been able to do in quite some time. On top of that the yearly RM party planning has begun. And as the choza gets even closer to becoming habitable, we are also thinking about our housewarming party. Keep your calendars open for the bash. Perhaps June. Maybe July. Tal vez August. Capaz setiembre, Puede ser octubre. De repente noviembre. Vamos a ver. Regardless we'll do our best to keep you in the loop. It's really looking quite amazing. We hope to



Cob, wattle and daub composting toilet and shower

photo by Tim O'Hara

put a picture or two on the website when it's done. Before getting to the real content I wanted to also quickly mention that there are two 2-acre lots that border the Ranch that went on the market recently. Drop us a quick line if you'd like to know more. Alrighty then. Here you go. Enjoy and send news when you can.

This month's update includes:

RM Program News : The Elizabeth and Skip Show

Conservation Update : Garden Transformation

Building Report : Class Notes, Hankey Headway and Oh So Close

Volunteer/Guest Gossip : Sir Roger Whalley Day

Community Facts/Stories : More Tears and a Glimmer of Hoops

Comida Corner : Curried Chickpea with Tomatoes, Ginger and Cilantro

Fútbol Follies : Campeonato Update

Inspirational Impressions : Loaves and Fishes

RM Program News : The Elizabeth and Skip Show

Leaving the cold winter of Vermont behind, LIZABETH MONIZ and her lovely husband SKIP DEWHIRST returned to conduct their fourth Yestermorrow class on natural building in the tropics. This year's course drew a wide range of diverse and fascinating folk, including a practicing architect, and interior designer, a biodynamic farmer, an urban planner, a devoted surfer, an active traveler and the usual ragtag crew of exceptionally attractive Yestermorrow interns. The crew arrived with vision and excitement sufficient to build a bamboo skyscraper, but the laborious reality of natural building scaled back the project to a kick-ass entrance space for the new classroom behind Jeanne's house. The project was designed to incorporate a variety of building methods and materials including cob, wattle and daub, bamboo framing, rock foundation work, and locally milled cedar woodworking. The class struck a pioneering path into the furniture design world with the development of the soon-to-be patented Tropical Ottoman©. Much cob was stomped, many fishmouths were cut, loads of dirt were hauled, and some muddy nudity just might have happened. After two weeks of dawn 'til dusk assbusting, the plain-Jane structure that used to be was revealed as a sensuous new beauty in the Ranch's roster of handmade buildings.

By Aaron Westgate

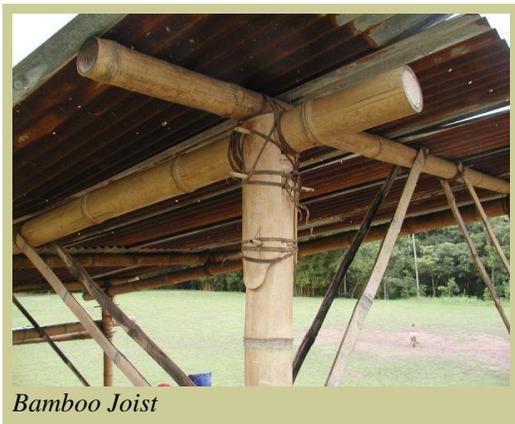
Conservation Update : Garden Transformation

Over the course of the last few months, many changes have taken place in the winding gardens in front of the main house and Jeanne's. Trays of green sprouts reside half the time under the ping-pong table, half the time soaking up plentiful rays of sunshine. Nearly every day this month, one could look out and find smiling superstar volunteers digging and their labors have yielded quite the transformation. The most notable change is the new well-tilled, raindrop shaped bed outlined with stones over at Jeanne's. The corn, squash, and beans that are planted here are marked with signs in both English and Spanish. In front of the Main House, we have a new collection of tomato, tomatillo, red pepper, melon and okra seedlings making their way into the world. Much thanks to volunteer ELINOR BAZAAR, who has cared for these well-loved seedlings and jump-started their progress. Now they are flourishing in the hands of another long-term volunteer, THERESA NOBLE. All of us at the Ranch are hoping the seedlings thrive in the next few weeks and begin to

produce in a couple months.

So, looking back at the title: what the heck does all this garden work have to do with conservation? Quite a bit actually. Anyone who has recently spent a day in the kitchen concocting delicious meals for the hearty eaters of the University of Washington can attest to the huge quantities of chow that disappear here every day. For many of us, it is easy to forget where our food comes from and how much effort it takes to produce. In Mastatal, we are connected to our foods through local farmers as well as Eden and Fernando's deliveries. All of this consumption requires two kinds of energy: human power and power generated from fossil fuels to produce and transport foods to us. By planting new crops here at the Ranch, we are developing a stronger connection to the land and deeper appreciation of what it takes to feed oneself. Each sprout holds the promise of harvests to come. The soil has been prepared with our own composts, thus closing a nutrient cycle and returning our wastes to produce once again. And finally, every step away from dependence on fossil fuels to bring us our food is a step towards greater sustainability. Through this practical education in small-scale agriculture, students and volunteers alike are exploring the wide world of Permaculture and veggie madness. In the end, we know that this tremendous labour of love will bear delicious results not only for our table but for the planet as well.

By Miss Emily Jump



Building Report: Class Notes, Hankey Headway and Oh So Close

The bamboo classroom has finally developed a bit of character thanks to recent workshop participants, volunteers and local workers. The changes and additions scream rustic yet sleek. AARON WESTGATE has been heading up the construction since the Yestermorrowers departed from town at the end of March. He's had help from a number of folks including but not limited to ROB HANKEY, GREG WATSON and MATT STONE. The main room floor is now about halfway laid as ALEX and GILBERTH progress "poquita a poco" to make this space usable. We're still quite

a ways off from calling this "done" but it's finally starting to feel as if this building will begin transforming the Ranch as no other building has to date.

The Hankey now has a hat and the remnants of walls. The floor joists will be going down shortly followed by the floorboards and the stairway; yes a two-story structure at the Ranch. Can you believe it? This structure draws "oohs" and "ahs" by all of those that set their eyes on it. Once this house for future volunteers is finished demand for the volunteer/intern program may go through the roof so book your spot in this dazzling edifice soon.

And finally to the "choza". No, it's not finished yet. No, we're not sleeping there yet. As everyone who has ever built something from scratch before knows, the detail work of any structure takes as much time or more as it does to get to the point where you can start working on the details. The house looks amazing, and even better now as Susan's students begin to work their Permaculture magic in the front yard. The limewash is done and the front doors are hung. An "abrazo grande y

fuerte” to TYLER SEE who with Timo made the doors a beautiful reality. The final layer of the cob floor in the bedroom, some trim and tons of cleaning, and a bit of furniture is all that’s left before the new renters can move in.

We’ll be doing our best to get pictures of all of these structures up on the website as soon as we remember and have the time. In the meantime we hope that you’ll have the opportunity to pop in and see the new buildings with your own eyes. 2007’s building calendar’s starting to take shape too with a couple’s cabin and a new kitchen and storage shed on the horizon. Come on down and don’t forget your hammer and tape.



Our work at Rancho Mastatal happens because we get the most amazing volunteers

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Sir Roger Whalley Day

Remember when you would beg Mom and Dad for permission to eat cupcakes for breakfast? Thank goodness our parents here at Rancho Mastatal aren’t so strict and know butter cream frosting to be an excellent source of protein. Frostilicious chocolate confections seemed like the ideal way to kick off the **FIRST ANNUAL SIR ROGER WHALLEY DAY**, followed by multiple hours of friendly blood sport. Full contact sack races anyone?

Prior to playtime, Ranch volunteers and community members gathered for the opening ceremony declaring April 1st to be Sir Roger Whalley Day. The proclamation was drafted by ALAN SMITH and read in English by G-UNIT (yeah!) and in Spanish by Timoteo. Robin then presented Sir Roger with a handcrafted key to Mastatal, with a handle shaped like La Cangreja and the letter M. Roger and his minions then proceeded to storm the football pitch and get their game on.

Thanks to BEN YEOMANS and TYLER SEE for organizing the games which included a relay

race, egg toss, tug of war, kickball, volleyball, and soccer. Timoteo provided the translations while the gringos demonstrated various forms of self-humiliation like leap frog and dizzy lizzy. All present were divided amongst four teams and JUNIOR, LILY, ANNIA, HILBERT, ALEX, FRANKIE, MOISES, DAVID, and JENNY were among the Ticos who threw caution to the wind and joined the activities. Roger was heard exclaiming “Go On!” countless times throughout the afternoon as his team, Ingleterra, made an impressive showing.

In the end Costa Rica usurped victory from Ingleterra, with Estados Unidos trailing in third and the fiefdom of Ass Kicking Rampage rounding out the fourth position. Following the festivities, the ravenous group gorged themselves on bagel sammie sams, while watching Roger’s Great Performances such as “Bed of Roses” and “All That She Wants” on the videoscreen/bedsheet. Later in the week it came time to bid Roger farewell. In the words of Gloria Gaynor, “I never can say goodbye.” So instead I’ll opt for “Hello sweetheart.”

By Karen Watson

The ROGER era has come to an end in Mastatal. It’s a near impossible task to express in words what Rog has meant to Mastatal. To sum up his accomplishments and his importance to this community in one or two paragraphs is a daunting task. Fortunately, without reading any further, many of you already understand how remarkable a person Roger is and what his departure means to everyone in Mastatal. You have been blessed to spend a minute, an hour, a day, a week, a month or more with one of the greatest people that we have ever had the honor to call our friend. Roger has left Mastatal to aspire towards a career in the medical field. A move inspired by a book, a great teacher, and an experience that helped define his life up until this moment. It’s an absolute understatement to say that we’ll miss Roger. He has been the heart and soul of the Ranch and with his departure from our home and community we are now lesser. There’s presently a big crater in our home, something that only time will slowly fill in as we get accustomed to life without crotch carrots, hilarious word-for-word quotes of The Office, big energy-giving hugs, and a way of being that we have all grown to love. We will, with difficulty at first and then with fond memories, move forward and persevere in our friend’s absence. Take with us what we learned from him and strive to make our community what he was working to help it become. We miss and love you Rog. You’ve helped to make Mastatal a more beautiful place to call home. We are forever indebted. Thank you.



The graduation ceremony at the local school

Community Facts/Stories: More Tears and a Glimmer of Hoops

photo by Claudio Pinzauti

It was with great sadness that we recently received news that ROSA, the elementary school's teacher for more than three years, was asked to leave to make room for a teacher with more tenure than her. It was a severe blow to primary education in our town as Rosa has been a motivated and caring teacher since her arrival to the "escuela". She loves her students and was devastated to receive the cheerless news from the Ministry of Education, and this on the same day that we had given her a donated laptop (thanks MARK!) for use at the school. She was so enthusiastic at how the computer was going to help her with her lesson plans. We would like to wish Rosa the best in her upcoming endeavors and will stay optimistic knowing that she is now positively changing the lives of other young kids in another part of Costa Rica.

On a nicer note, ALAN SMITH bequeathed one of the greatest gifts ever to Mastatal; a new basketball hoop in the community center. It's been insanelly popular and on occasion we hear the bouncing ball well into the night. It has given the local kids an outlet and provides them with an additional recreational opportunity, especially now that the rains have started. Alan painted the well-built backboard the colors of the Costa Rica flag and though the rim's a bit stiff, it promises to endure years of swishes, clunks and bricks; and when GEOFF returns to Mastatal, a few dunks as well. On a night a few weeks back a group of gringos went over to the community center at around 9 p.m. thinking that they'd have the court to themselves. When they arrived they found a dozen young sweaty ticos running around on the unfinished concrete floor deep in a pickup game. Although they were disappointed by not being able to run around themselves right away, it brought smiles to their faces knowing that these boys were getting some good honest exercise instead of sitting in front of the "pulperia" or watching shitty soap operas somewhere. We've already talked about putting up a second hoop in the coming months so that we can begin some full-court action and there's even been talk about starting a small league one night a week. You're the man A Smith. We love you brother and will be looking forward to see you down here again soon. If for no other reason than to swat one of your layups into Bolivar's pasture.

Comida Corner: Curried Chickpea with Tomatoes, Ginger and Cilantro

This yummy soup comes from the bible, the Rebar Modern Food Cookbook. This will be a great one to make when all those tomatoes come into season!
Serves 8.

Ingredients:

- 8 cups vegetable stock
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 yellow onion, finely diced
- 2 tsp salt
- 2 bay leaves
- 8 garlic cloves
- 3 tbsp minced ginger (or more!!)
- 2 jalapeno peppers, seeded (or red chile flakes if you don't have fresh chiles)
- 1 red pepper



Freshly baked bread from the Mastatal cob oven
photo by Claudio Pinzauti

6 ripe tomatoes
1 tsp cumin seed
1 tsp coriander seed
1 tsp paprika
1 tsp garam masala
¼ tsp cracked peeper
1/8 tsp turmeric
3 cups cooked chickpeas
¼ cup mango chutney (you can make your own, recipe follows, or buy some prepared)
½ can coconut milk (or fresh chopped in a food processor)
½ bunch cilantro, minced

1. Heat the oil in a soup pot and add onion, 1 tsp salt and bay leaves. Sauté until the onions are soft and golden. Meanwhile, place the garlic, ginger, jalapenos, pepper and tomatoes in a food processor and pulse until the vegetables form a rough puree. Set aside.
2. Next, toast and grind the cumin and coriander seeds. Add these and all remaining spices to the sautéed onions and continue cooking and stirring for 5 minutes. Add the vegetable puree and another teaspoon of salt and simmer until small blobs of oil pool on the surface. Add the half the chickpeas and all of the stock and bring to a simmer. Cook several minutes, then add the chutney and coconut milk. Blend the other half of the chickpeas and add to the pot to thicken the soup. Simmer and season to taste with salt and cracked pepper. Add chopped cilantro just before serving.

Mango Chutney

Very easy to make and keeps well, for up to 3 weeks in the refrigerator. Makes 2 cups.

Ingredients:

Syrup

1 ½ cups sugar (we use tapa dulce)
½ cup wine vinegar
1 teaspoon minced garlic
1 tablespoon ground ginger
3 tablespoons dry mustard
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground red pepper
3 small firm, unripe mangoes (1 pound), peeled and cut into 1 inch pieces (if you can't get unripe mangoes use ripe ones, but cut down the sugar in the syrup.)
¼ cup dark raisins
¼ cup silvered almonds (optional)

1. Combine all the ingredients for the syrup in a stainless steel or enameled pan and bring to a boil over low heat, stirring often. Simmer until thick and syrupy, about 15 minutes.
2. Add the mango pieces and continue to cook for 10 minutes, or until the mango looks translucent. Turn off the heat. Add the raisins and almonds and serve warm or spoon into sterilized jars. When completely cool, cover and store.

Buen Provecho!



The Mastatal footballers at a recent game

F?tbol Follies: Campeonato Update

As each week comes to a close here in Mastatal, we remain true to a routine shared by thousands of communities around the world. And I'm not talking about sleeping in and eating brunch. While that's all good and well, I'm talking about putting on your Sunday best and heading for the field. For some it's jeans and a t-shirt, for others it's a sleek, starchy uniform with mismatched socks, but everyone's got "la fiebre". What unfolds from the first "gallo" and Imperial to the final whistle will permeate the undertones of local cantina banter for days to come. Such has been the scene in Mastatal for years, yet until now there has been no official report in the RM newsletter. Thus, thanks to a little nudge from SIR ROGER WHALLEY, we are proud to bring you the first official edition of

Futbol Follies. With no further ado, vamos al fútbol.

March was a big month for both Costa Rican and international play. Saprissa and La Liga seemed destined for another Clásico to wrap up the year, though not before dealing with red-hot Puntarenas and Las Brujas de Escazú. Over in Europe, Arsenal and Barcelona continued to advance smoothly through the UEFA Champions league, looking to butt heads in Paris in May. Meanwhile, the local action has been heating up for weeks, culminating in the start of a 3-month "campeonato" between Mastatal and 5 surrounding towns – San Miguel, Zapatón, San Vicente, Guarumal and Salitrales. Given a first week bye, and coming off an eight game undefeated streak, Los Galácticos traveled short-staffed to La Vasconia and suffered a friendly loss to the youth phenoms of Bijagual. A few pregame beers wasted and some humility gained, Mastatal then regrouped for its first tournament match-up the following week in Guarumal.

Los Galácticos roared out of the gates against Salitrales with a goal in the opening minutes. They kept pressuring early on but soon began to succumb to the brute size and strength of their opponents. A hard foul near the box and a miscalculation by Caraca in goal quickly led to two goals against Mastatal, putting a damper on the team's halftime morale. Digging deep into their 17-man squad, Los Galácticos pulled out the boyfriend of Marcos' sister, who proceeded to produce a second-half hat trick and seal the 4-2 victory for los amarillos. Other results from the day included a hometeam victory over San Miguel and a Zapatón victory over San Vicente.

The following week's action was found in San Miguel, where Mastatal faced its trash-talking neighbor, San Vicente. The ref got an earful from both sides of the ball, but in the end it came down to sheer talent, as superstar Junior Hernandez put away two in the back of the net to overcome a San Vicente penalty kick. Meanwhile, with five goals in the second half, Guarumal

sealed a victory over Zapatón, and Salitrales put away the hometeam in the day's opening game.

Halfway into April, after three weeks of play, the standings were as follows:

TEAM	W	L	T	PTS
Guarumal	2	0	1	7
Mastatal	2	0	0	6
Zapatón	1	1	1	4
Salitrales	1	1	0	3
San Miguel	0	2	1	1
San Vicente	0	2	1	1

At this point Mastatal was feeling confident and looking forward to the next obstacle, perhaps the most challenging of them all. But with Semana Santa coming up, they'd have to wait two weeks to face off with Guarumal.

Inspirational Impressions : Loaves and Fishes

This is not the age of information.

*This is not
the age of information.*

Forget the news,
and the radio,
and the blurred screen.

This is the time
of loaves
and fishes.
People are hungry,
and one good word is bread
for a thousand.

--- *David Whyte*

See you again in a few weeks.

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew