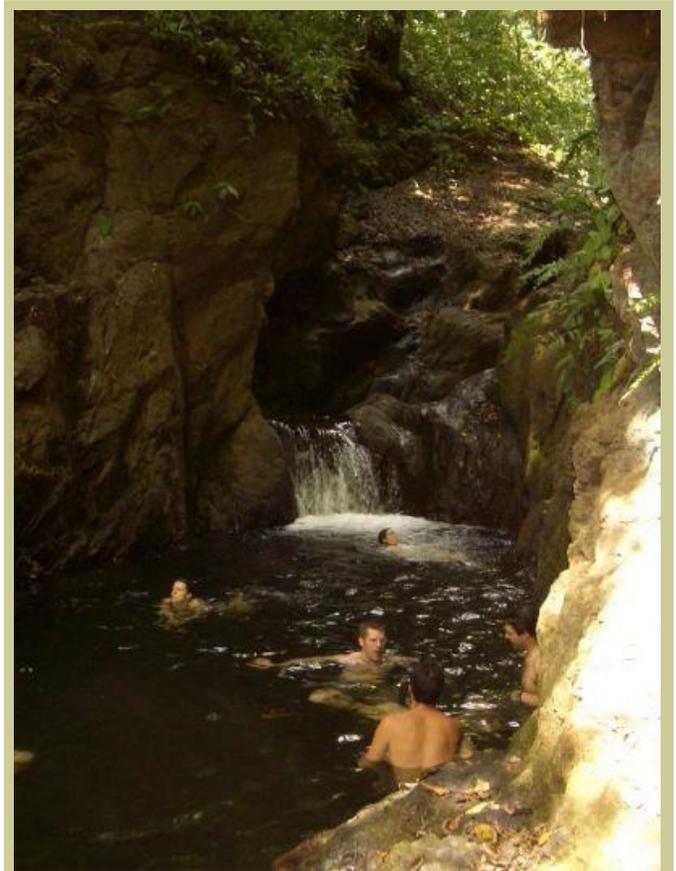


Rancho Mastatal Updates

February 2006

This is the unfortunate result when a publication temporarily loses its chief editor. We've been without SPARKY for over a month now and already we're at least that far behind on the release of our award-winning newsletter. Sparkles, we hope that you're doing well in the land of black gold and longhorns. We'll be looking forward to see you again before too long. To the rest of our readers out there, greetings from Mastatal once again and our sincere apologies for the delayed issue. Did someone say it's already April? Sheesh. There's been a bit of coming and going these past many weeks with some hard goodbyes and a number of brilliant reunions. We recently bid farewell to a fantastic group from Villanova University, the third crew from this nearby Philadelphia university that has visited the Ranch in the past two years. They've put together an amazing program that we plan to nourish in the coming years. Best of luck to the Wildcats and the rest of the Big East in the ongoing (when I started writing this at least) NCAA Basketball Championships. Hoops fans, please send us some news when you can. March was a group-heavy month. In addition to the students from Villanova we had visits from a wonderful group of high school students from a small town outside of Toronto and an inspiring collection of college kids from the University of Texas. Both crews of motivated young adults spent their Spring Breaks learning a bit about the rainforest and helping out in our community. In recent weeks we've reunited with TYLER SEE, one of the Ranch's original long-term Hall of Famers as well as a product of the Big East. We'll reticently be pulling for the Hoyas this (last now) month. It's super awesome to have Flameboy back in Mastatal for another long stay. There's certainly not enough space here to mention all of the inspirational and wonderful folks in Mastatal at the moment though I should take a minute to share that our globetrotting friend JEN SNYER from Berkeley has graced us with her presence for a second time. She'll soon be joined by her nephew ELLIOT. Some of you will be happy to also hear that we've been living next door to SEI alum GREG WATSON and his wife KAREN for the last month or so as they thankfully decided to come and spend some time with us after selling their house in Washington. They're both amazing and a pure pleasure to have with us in the main house The choza is nearing its completion as ROGER, ROBIN, GILBERTH, ALEX and their crew of limey bastards put on the final touches of the plaster



Lunch Break at the Waterfalls

photo by Paul Noriega

and begin the wash. The Hankey House continues to take form with the recent raising of the third of four bents. This leaves one more before the rafters and roof are put on in preparation for the approaching rains. In fact we've already received three good rains in March so the scorched front lawn, also scarred from a recent bout of horseshoes, should soon be showing signs again of it's Irishness. I'll try and put a picture or two up on the Yahoo! Group site after sending out this message to you all. The house when it's completed will be worthy of some of the natural building books resting in our library. We had the recent opportunity to give a big hug to SKIP and LIZABETH as they arrived for their fourth year of teaching Yestermorrow's natural building workshop in Mastatal. We'll have much more to report from them in our next newsletter. We'll also soon have more information about SUSAN's 2006 Quarter Abroad. We'll do our best to get the March newsletter out before this summer. So as not to delay this any longer, here you go. Enjoy!

This month's update includes:

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[Building Report:](#) Hankey Happenings

[Volunteer/Guest Gossip:](#) Future Documentary

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RM Program News: Solar Energy International 2006

January saw the arrival of yet another group of alternative energy fanatics as we sponsored our third annual Solar Energy International (SEI) Renewable Energy in the Developing World workshop in Mastatal. The class enrollment filled up again this year thanks mostly to IAN WOOFENDEN'S marketing prowess, persistence, and seemingly eternal energy. SEI's upstanding reputation in the industry certainly helps as well. Needless to say there were plenty of willing and able hands to plug away on the three electrifying projects that made up this year's program. We installed our second SEI sponsored methane biodigester at CHILO and ARABELA's house just past the school. Their petite population of porkers is providing the poo to power this amazingly simple yet efficient energy generator. The manure gets mixed with water before being washed into a long cylindrical tube where the waste breaks down into effluent and methane gas. The gas can be used to power lights or a kitchen stove and the effluent is utilized on agricultural crops as a rich fertilizer. This is a wonderful technology that is totally appropriate to our region. The word on the street is that the bag is inflating and that Chilo and Arabela's family will be cooking with methane in a matter of weeks. We were inspired enough this year to start thinking more seriously about installing a human poop powered-biodigester here at the Ranch. We seem to have enough ass cheeks and delicious fiber rich food about the Ranch these days to warrant making this a reality. We may even include this project as part of SEI's 2007 Mastatal workshop. In addition to the new biodigester down the road, we set up a small solar installation over at the "choza" that will provide light for the new house while becoming a nice example of the sun's ability to provide us with electricity. Moreover we built a solar oven with the help of the amazing women of Sol de Vida in Guanacaste. The newly constructed and colorfully painted solar oven will be donated to the winner of our upcoming Solar Cooking Contest. All in all it was a hugely successful week. Big thanks to

IAN, NORA, DEAN, and JEFF for heading up a spectacular week and to all of the guest speakers and workshop participants that helped make it an unforgettable get together. See you in 2007.



One of our fine, furry animal-friends...

photo by Aaron Drury

Conservation Update: Ocelot's in Our Presence

A few weeks ago, while walking back from the beautiful waterfall/swimming hole below the main house, a mixed student/volunteer group spotted what I would consider the most exciting animal yet in our 4-plus years at the Ranch. We've had one other cat spotting since arriving, but in this case, the small group watched an ocelot dance through the forest for a number of seconds. They were able to confidently identify this beautiful feline, a member of the leopard family, the largest of the small spotted cats and an endangered species here in Costa Rica. These mostly nocturnal animals when moving about during the day keep well hidden so this spotting was definitely rare and really quite amazing. We're thrilled to have been reminded of the importance of protecting our surrounding forests to provide some important habitat for these incredibly beautiful creatures. Pico better be a bit more careful on his frequent visits into the forest or he just may find himself face-to-face with Cu's distant cousin Bubba. We hope that through some more hard

work and a bit of assistance from other community members and visitors in the coming years that we can figure out ways to bring these astounding cats back from the brink of extinction.

Building Report: Hankey Happenings

The middle of February saw a minor landmark in the progress of The Hankey – the newest building project at the Ranch – the first bent-raising came just before Valentines Day.

We had spent about 2weeks prior to the event processing the teak poles – removing every little bit of bark and treating them with a mould and insect repellent. It was a long and labour-intensive process but with a solid crew of strippers and a pumping stereo we stormed through the task. GEOFF – as per usual – did the work of about 4 people and single-handedly stripped half the logs that we needed for that bent. VICTORIA insists that they were a team... but from a bystander's viewpoint, the reality of the matter was that her side of the 'partnership' was to sit on the log and try to stabilize it as Geoff wielded his drawknife in a Viking-style fury. Running along side the log stripping was the off-site construction of the bent. The bent/frame was laid out on flat ground (to ensure all the posts were in the same plain), the joints were bolted and the logs coded to aid reassembly. Then the frame was disassembled and at each joint, one side of the log (where it meets

another log) was ‘flat spotted’ – a technique employed to increase the contact area between the logs – and on the other side we cut a countersink hole where a nut and washer will sit. Once all of that was done we carried the pieces onto the site and started to reassemble it.

There was lots of prep work to do on site. We rigged a pulley system into a neighbouring tree to assist in lifting the bent – JEREMIAH, AKA Monkey Boy, had been looking forward to putting his climbing to use and shimmied up the tree in no time. We anchored the posts down to the foundations to stop them from slipping and created a platform to stand on while walking the bent up. After several days of setting up and careful planning the time had come... was my design going to stand up??? The raising went very smoothly, it is certainly true – many hands make light work – and yes, everything stood up as it was supposed to. We soon had the bent braced off and were climbing all over the towering frame, checking out the new views. It definitely seems a lot bigger now that it’s standing vertical (rather than laying flat on the ground) and proves to be the tallest building in Mastatal.

The rest of February saw us start to repeat the same process with the other 3 bents. We have decided to prepare the bents and wait until they are all finished before raising them in quick succession, so we’re looking forward to an exciting few weeks of raisings but till then it’s back to stripping!

Rob Hankey

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Future Documentary

Those involved in sustainable living practices, especially in places like Rancho Mastatal, could be the catalysts that shake the foundations of the everyday wasteful practices that many of us see on a daily basis. Some of us may even be a part of those wasteful ways that are leading us down what we all know to be the wrong path toward something potentially horrific. There are most certainly problems with the current state of affairs in the average lifestyle of most human beings, especially in “developed” nations. Obviously, there exists a variety of means in opening people’s eyes to the ability to make changes in the way they live (which is much easier than most people may think). The Ranch is one great living example. Another returning volunteer, ALAN SMITH, and I have been discussing the idea of bringing the view that is shared by Tim, Robin, and almost all of us who visit the Ranch to a larger audience. The medium that we both consider most influential to the target audience, and the one that we are both most passionate about, is film. I have been thinking about making a documentary in Mastatal for quite some time now, but struggled with exactly what angle to take on it. Instead, I realized that there is no looking in on a place like this. You can only take what you have learned and then look out. Alan quickly jumped on the documentary idea with me once I brought it to the table, and we have been bouncing ideas back and forth to each other ever since. Our list of connections and resources is constantly growing with every conversation and with every new head thrown into the ongoing discussion. The idea that has evolved is a comparative look between the Ranch (which we may keep anonymous) and just about everywhere else, although we will limit the “everywhere else” as we bang out the details. Again, this is an idea in the works. Currently, Alan and I plan on returning sometime toward the end of the year to begin filming. We have received a lot of feedback and brilliant ideas from other volunteers here in Mastatal, and we would love to hear more. If you would like to share anything at all or even just

learn more about the project, feel free to email me with comments or questions. Action! Brian “Sparky” O’Rourke

bloopoomango@yahoo.com

Community Facts/Stories: Camp, School, and the Grass-Dance

The local kids have had to say goodbye to summer camp in order to welcome a new year of school. As mentioned earlier, VERO led a two-month long camp so that the children’s time away from the books would not be idle. Instead, they had the opportunity to continue to regularly see each other, experience some cultural exchange, and have fun. The camp was a smashing success, and it culminated with an end-of-camp party for those involved and their friends and families. We fired up the community cob oven, solar-cooked some bread, prepared other dishes, blasted some tunes, received a good turnout, and enjoyed some social time. There couldn’t have been a better transition as the students return to their desks,



Katia & Ion - one of our many neighbors and friends from the village of Mastatal

or for ION and MOISES (Kattia’s and Laura’s respective sons) to take their seats for the first time! On top of that, our favorite local teacher unexpectedly returned to teach the elementary crew for at least one more year. Welcome back ROSA! Her presence really does make a huge difference in this community, and we are ecstatic to see her face again. She and Roger have set up a daily schedule for volunteers from the Ranch to spend part of their afternoon leading activities at the school for the children (as well as continuing to teach English every Wednesday morning). The buzz is already positive among the kids.

The soccer committee also organized yet another community dance to raise much-needed funds for grass seed for the soccer field. Volunteers and local players recently attacked the few remaining uneven areas of the field with a pick-ax, shovels, and rakes in preparation for the seed and upcoming games. Although the field is currently functional, we continuously look forward to the day that it becomes the premier pitch in the region. The premier team deserves it, as do the community and all of the amazing volunteers and groups that come down and join us for some major gaming. Luckily, the dance was successful in raising the funds. It also provided some memorable moments and plenty of good times. It did not, however, provide tamales. Instead, we gave the cob-oven a go, and it worked out amazingly well. Not only was the cooking much less labor-intensive, but it also put the tamales to shame in the edible hierarchy of deliciousness. The cob and solar revolutions continue!!!

Brian “Sparky” O’Rourke

bloopoomango@yahoo.com

Comida Corner: Samosas

Here is another gem that sparkles from the endless mine of delectable recipes in traditional Indian

cuisine. The samosa appears to be the long lost cousin to the empanada, one of Costa Rica's own little gems. Do not let appearances fool you though; these two mouth-stuffers are as different as emeralds and rubies as you proceed to polish them off. The *Moosewood Cookbook* brings us one more diamond in the rough with this delicious stuffed pastry.

Yields 15 or 16 medium-sized, very satisfying pastries (enough for 6-8 people)

The Dough:

2 ½ cups flour

½ tsp salt

1-cup buttermilk or yogurt

extra flour, as needed

1. Place the flour in a medium-sized bowl. Mix in the salt.
2. Make a well in the center, and add the buttermilk or yogurt. Mix first with a spoon and then with your hand, to make smooth dough.
3. Add extra flour, as needed, to keep the dough from being sticky. The dough will be quite soft. Knead in the bowl for about 5 minutes. Cover tightly and refrigerate until you are ready to assemble the pastries.

The Filling:

2 large potatoes (the size of a large person's fist)

1 tbsp butter

1 cup finely minced onion

2 medium cloves garlic, minced

1 tbsp freshly grated ginger

1 tsp mustard seeds

1 tsp dried coriander (if available)

¾ tsp salt

1 ½ cups uncooked green peas (frozen, thawed = fine) (feel free to substitute carrots or other veggies here)

2 tbsp lemon juice

cayenne, to taste

1. Peel the potatoes and chop them into 1-inch pieces. Place in a saucepan, cover with water, and boil until very soft. Drain and transfer to a medium-sized bowl. Mash and set aside.
2. Melt the butter in a heavy skillet. Add onion, garlic, ginger, mustard seeds, coriander, and salt. Sauté over medium heat about 8 to 10 minutes, or until the onions are quite soft. Add this to the mashed potatoes, along with the remaining ingredients. Mix well, but try not to smash the peas. Cool for at least 15 minutes before filling the pastries.

The Dipping Sauce (easy to make while the samosas bake):

½ cup cider vinegar

½ cup water

3 tbsp brown sugar

1 small clove garlic, minced

1 tsp salt

1. Place all ingredients in a small saucepan. Stir until the sugar dissolves.
2. Heat to boiling, then let simmer uncovered for about 10 minutes. It will reduce slightly.
3. Serve warm or at room temperature with hot samosas.

To Assemble and Bake:

1. Preheat the oven to 425 degrees Fahrenheit. Generously oil a baking sheet.
2. Keep a small container of flour, a fork, a small bowl of water, and a pastry brush close at hand. Flour a clean surface, and, one by one, roll 1-inch balls of dough into 5-inch circles, using a rolling pin.
3. Place approximately 1 ½ tbsp filling in the center of each circle, and fold over, just like a turnover. Brush the inside edges of each circle with a little water, and fold the edges together to make a small hem. Crimp the edges firmly with the fork.
Note: If you are storing the samosas to bake later on, place them on a heavily floured plate or tray, dust the tops with more flour, and cover tightly. Store in the refrigerator or freezer until baking time.
4. To bake: Place the samosas on the oiled baking sheet. Brush the tops with oil. Bake 15 minutes at 425 degrees Fahrenheit, then reduce heat to 375 degrees and bake for 10 minutes more. For maximum crispiness, turn the samosas over when you turn the oven down.
5. Serve within 15 minutes of baking, with dipping sauce. A nice way to serve the sauce is in individual saucers or tiny bowls, so each person can hold both the samosa and sauce directly under his or her face while eating, and the sauce bowl can catch the drips (it does drip, but that is once of the charms of this ritual).]

Buen Provecho!

F?tbol Folly: Chalk One Up

This section is the newest addition to our world-renowned newsletter and was inspired by a simple request from Mr. Roger Whalley. Due to his upcoming departure he has kindly asked us to keep him updated on the progress, gossip and results in the world of Los Galacticos (the name of our soccer team and loosely translated to “The Incredibles”) de Mastatal. We were fortunately able to bring home a victory this past weekend for Roger’s last game as a Galactico, a big 4-2 victory over Salitrales in the first-round of an important local tournament. We’ll be playing for the Englishman for the rest of the 10-week tourney and hope to bring positive news in our next update. Chalk up 3 points for the “Los Increíbles”. We’re on a roll with only one loss in our last 10 and we’re hungry for Mastatal’s first-ever modern-day Championship. More to follow soon for all of you former players, fans and followers of the most exciting sports team in rural Costa Rica.

Inspirational Impressions: Natural Capitalism

“We have lived by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. We have been wrong. We must change our lives, so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption that what is good for the world will be good for us. And that requires that we make the effort to know the world and to learn what is good for it. We must learn to cooperate in its processes, and to yield to its limits. But even more important, we must learn to acknowledge that the creation is full

of mystery; we will never clearly understand it. We must abandon arrogance and stand in awe. We must recover the sense of the majesty of the creation, and the ability to be worshipful in its presence. For it is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it”.

----- Wendell Berry

Ciao.

Abrazos,

Tim, Robin, Sparky, Roger and the Crew