

# Rancho Mastatal Updates

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## January 2006

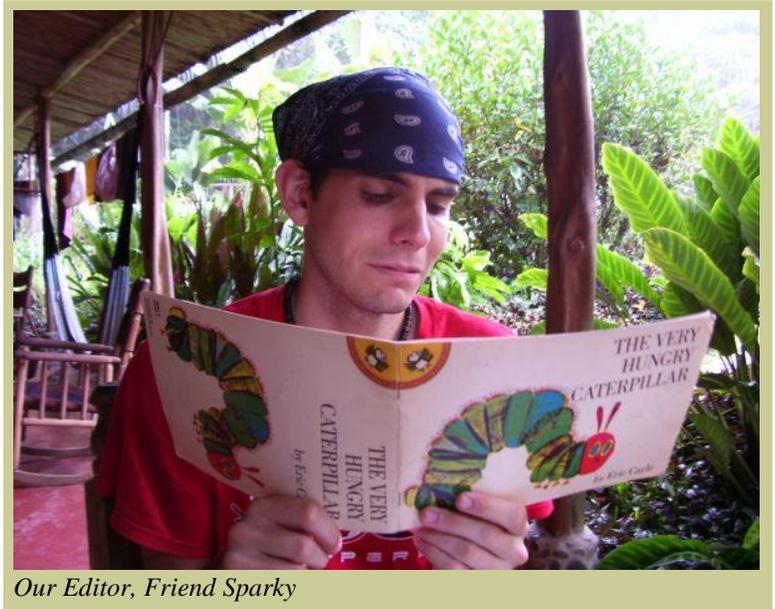
Our sincerest regards to the Seahawk Nation. Damn refs. Congratulations to the Bus, Pittsburgh and blue collar workers around the world.

We recently bid farewell to IAN WOOFENDEN and his solar crew after another successful renewable energy course that saw the installation of a small solar array on the “choza” and a biogester, powered by pigs, at Chilo and Arabela’s. We also built a solar oven that will soon be gifted to the winner of an upcoming cooking contest open to all locals. Up next

on the docket is a short workshop on building with bamboo. Martín Coto, Costa Rica’s premier bamboo builder, and Darrel DeBoer, a well-known bamboo architect out of the Bay Area, will head this up.

That will bring us to the end of the shortest month of the year before a fairly hectic March bears down on the Ranch. March will see the arrival of a Canadian high school group led by IVO POLACH, our third visit from Villanova University, guided by Mr. TIBURON, a second visit from an organization named CROSS out of Austin, TX, and finally our yearly natural building workshop with SKIP and LIZABETH and the wonderful people of Yestermorrow. By far, the most difficult part of being a mainstay at the Ranch is having to say goodbye to so many amazing, inspirational people all too often. People come, share, learn, and then take away something with them to then pass on to others in places all over the world. New people come, and on goes this beautiful exchange of information, friendship, and wisdom. With that though comes the reality of having to say adieu to friends and family more than our fair share.

An integral member of our family will be headed back to the States for a stint. SPARKY is moving to the outskirts of Dallas, TX to live with a close friend and earn some money so that he can buy an Apple and a camera with the hopes of starting to add to his film portfolio in preparation for the application process to film school. He’s hoping to return to Mastatal to shoot a documentary about this place in the near future. Big time studios are already lining up. Goodbyes to close friends and family have few redeeming qualities. Let’s face it. They make you sad. They make you yearn for past times. In general they make you feel like shit. But once this passes it gives you time to reflect on everything that the departed person means to you. And it gives you time to imagine how that person is going to affect the rest of the world in the future. And then you begin to think about future encounters and projects and the hope and happiness just kind of take over. So, by the time you read



*Our Editor, Friend Sparky*

this, we will have already bid farewell to one of the most remarkable and loving people that has ever graced the presence of this little town. He's been our social director, our clown, our grand slam champion, our volleyball king, our chief editor, our stomper, our barby sauce maker, our firestarter, our lip synch champ and candlestick maker and most importantly our brother. Yeah, it sucks having to say goodbye, but it's easy to smile when I think of the greatness that is headed towards TX. God knows it needs it. Yeehaw Sparkles. Shots fired. What'd ya say? We love you so much. Already counting the days until we can hug again.

Abrazos,

*Tim, Robin, Sparky, Michelle, Roger and the Crew*

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This month's update includes:

- [RM Program News](#): Wilderness First Responder (Again!!!)
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- [Building Report](#): The Last Stretch and New Building Blocks
- [Volunteer/Guest Gossip](#): Remote Jungle Haven
- [Community Facts/Stories](#): New Soccer Field
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*Terciopelo*

*photo by Claudio Pinzauti*

**RM Program News: Wilderness First Responder (Again!!!)**

The Aerie School for Backcountry Medicine ([www.aerimed.com](http://www.aerimed.com)) once again graced us with their presence for another spectacular Wilderness First Responder Certification Course, led by DAVE and FERNANDO. Their expertise and personalities mix well in creating the perfect instructor-student relationships throughout the 72-hour course. Of course, they couldn't have had a better group to work with. Thank you to EVAN, TOM, YES-I, CARLOS, LISA, MARY, LAURIE, BRYAN, JEREMIAH, DESA, and FRANKIE for being

model students and great friends to everyone here during your stay. ROGER and GEOFF also participated in many of these classes while getting re-certified. Congratulations to all of you. While they were taking notes, acting out scenarios, looking at slides, and gobbling up loads of important and potentially life-saving information, the rest of us here at the Ranch (besides keeping up with the usual work that goes on) were being entertained by the wonderful ANDREA, ANNA, and MARIA. You've certainly made a lasting impression on everyone, and we all look forward to seeing you again soon.

Thank you also to DAVE, GARRY, KIM, TIMOTHY, GEOFF, ROGER, VERONIQUE,

VIRGINIE, ELEANOR, and JEFF for joining me in some very challenging acting sessions as we created some intense scenarios for both the instructors and students. The highlight, of course, was the creation of a plane crash scene down by one of our favorite swimming holes. The students were forced to deal with a variety of broken bones, head traumas, burns, dying victims, dead bodies, and an illogical and offensive pilot, all on some very difficult terrain. Although the actual plane was never to be found, these new responders were brilliant and proved to be very capable of taking charge of the disastrous scene. Many victims were evacuated to safety, many lives were saved, and now we all have some pretty intense new memories that we're glad are fictional. On the other hand, there are many real memories that we created together as well, and we're all glad to say that they are indeed true. Whether it was volleyball, kickball, swimming, soccer, cranium, cards, rotate-pong, catching bedroom insects, getting to know each other, a show for the royal family, live poetry, music, hilarious storytelling, lip-syncing, or dancing like nerds and aliens, we had a great time with the whole gang. It's amazing how we can annually say, "this is going to be one of our best groups of the year" before the WFR course even arrives, and we can find that the quote consistently rings true. We couldn't have started this year off on a better foot.

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### **Conservation Update:** Capuchins and Their Patches of Home

Over the past few weeks, there have been numerous sightings of a troop of white-faced capuchins on Rancho Mastatal property. You've seen these monkeys on television and may, sadly, recognize them as "organ-grinder" monkeys. Many live in captivity in the States as one of the nation's most popular zoo animals. Luckily, the trade of capuchins as pets is no longer legal (although it does still occur).

Unfortunately, they do still face some danger from human hunters. They have enough predators as it is (boa constrictors, birds-of-prey, jaguars,

etc.) without needing to worry about people. Hopefully, the presence of La Cangreja National Park, the Finca Magis Private Wildlife Reserve, and our own Rancho Mastatal Private Wildlife Reserve along with MINAE (the Ministry of the Environment) will translate into a safe natural habitat for these and many more animals.



*A troupe of white faced capuchin monkeys explore the forest near Rancho Mastatal*

The fact that these capuchins inhabit this area is a good sign for a potential start of something that we consider important. Their presence means that they are finding food here, which consists of fruits, insects, and some vegetative matter (and sometimes small mammals or lizards). When they forage on our property, it also means that they are dispersing seeds that will lead to new plant

growth. Ideally, this would become a cycle that would attract more and more plants, insects, and animals.

Much of it depends on the future of this area and the surrounding areas. It seems far too common that we see forested areas becoming isolated islands of wildlife. Development often separates nature into patches. There are places in Costa Rica that tourists can visit and be guaranteed to see lots of monkeys, but that is often because they are limited to that one small area. As part of a biological corridor that includes the land areas and properties mentioned above plus a few more in the region, we hope that the migration zone for our furry friends has increased in size and will continue to do so. If the Meso-American Biological Corridor ever becomes a complete success and reality, this corridor would extend from Mexico all the way into Panama. With some effort and cooperation on our part as humans, there is a chance that these animals and plants could thrive again instead of disappear. The capuchins we see here today may someday head on to another area, but many more just might stop by to thank us.

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*Steps of finely honed bamboo lead to the choza  
ba?o*

### **Building Report:** The Last Stretch and New Building Blocks

The Choza’s walls are drying more and more quickly as the dry season becomes more and more dry. It has been a strange January full of much more rainfall than we are used to around these parts, but the sun is once again beginning to steal the show. The wattle and daub walls, which are the thinner walls on the front of the Choza, have dried out nicely. That has meant that we have once again been able to raid the locals’ cow corrals for manure to use in our smear mixes. This smear is spread across the walls before our next step: lime-plastering. Our local workers have simultaneously been putting the finishing touches on the decorative ceilings, the roof, and bamboo finishes between the roof and walls, and between the floor and the ground. Once again, their work far exceeds professionalism. STACEY and ROBIN also sculpted a moon onto the front of the house, which really gives it that extra “yeah baby!” The house is a work of collaboration from many creative

geniuses, dirty hands, a variety of sources of knowledge, a large splash of innovation, and even a little grunt work. We are happily skipping down that last stretch (which will take some more time and collaboration) to one more dream come true, or at least dream come tangible. In addition, the foundations are being laid for a garden wall, which will add an aesthetically pleasing separation between the Choza and main trail from the road.

Meanwhile, all of the foundations are set at the Hankey House, and the teak poles are organized

and ready to be used for building. After weeks full of water-leveling, form-making, rebar-shaping and cutting, sand and gravel-hauling, measuring, sweating, laughing, more collaborating, mixing concrete, and pouring, we are ready to do some serious above-ground work. ROB HANKEY has continued to lead the building of his design, and nobody has even pondered the quality of his leadership or ideas. His head has not grown throughout the process, but instead he continuously asks others to put their heads together with his own each step of the way. He has been the light bulb and the glue for another humble yet confident and capable workforce full of the team spirit that embodies this place. We are all excited to be involved in this process as everything begins to take shape. Have you been high-fived lately? The happy-slaps have become so common here that it sounds like constant applause, emphasized with the sporadic “yeah baby!”

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*photo by Claudio Pinzauti*

**Volunteer/Guest Gossip:** Remote Jungle Haven

### **Remote Jungle Haven**

I apprehensively approached this remote jungle haven  
With nervous expectations in mind.  
The determined and deliberate aims of the welcoming owners  
Yet unknown to my citified ideals.  
The following months provided me an important education  
In the essentials of social responsibility,  
In thinking beyond myself to the bigger picture,  
And in the raw beauty of natural building,  
With its curvy demure and homely earthen walls.  
The constant thoroughfare of inspiring and like-minded volunteers

Showed me the benefits of community.  
As each day I was greeted with enthusiasm and warmth  
That infiltrated everything we did.  
Living in that incredible house  
Watching the awesome jungle  
Through windows that never closed  
I fell asleep listening to the symphonic night sounds  
As outside and inside merged.  
And as my confidence grew  
And I ventured alone to nearby majestic places  
My eyes turned into the beauty of the rain forest  
And my heart fell in love  
With this remote jungle haven.

Michelle Leyton



*The Mastatal footballers at a recent game*

### **Community Facts/Stories: New Soccer Field**

Twisting ankles and tripping feet beware! The days of uneven running grounds are behind us and all other soccer enthusiasts in Mastatal. Financed by the profits from the last community dance, the town's soccer field has been torn apart and leveled! Large trucks have recently been rolling through town to level and repair local roads in the wake of the rainy season, so the sports committee took advantage of their presence by paying them to do some dirty work. The work required almost all of the profit money, but there is enough left over to use as change for the next fundraiser (another community dance).

The only negative thing about this leveling is that the grass was also pulled away with the top layer of uneven ground. This has left us with a full field of dirt that doesn't feel quite as nice when we take the occasional spill. Consequently, one would think that the highlight reel would be cut down for the month. On the contrary, our gaming has been raised a notch or two over the past few weeks. The field is now home to a smaller-scale soccer field and a brand new volleyball court. Thanks Andrea for bringing down a parachute, complete with lining that we were able to use to create Mastatal's first functional volleyball net.

Luckily for all of us, the grass will not be gone forever. A successful dance would mean that we could spread more grass seeds, and everything grows pretty quickly here in the tropics. There are patches of grass already growing on their own. With a more level field, we will have one of the better, if not the best, soccer fields in the region. This could potentially attract more teams, more games, and more town functions. These would bring more and more improvements, and it is all due

to some true community effort by numerous people here in Mastatal. The highlight reel is about to expand. Get the tins ready.

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

### **Comida Corner: Rumbledethumps**

The name of this dish sounds like something out of a crazy story or fairy tale. That’s because nobody ever thought such a dish was possible until the *Moosewood Restaurant Cooks for a Crowd* cookbook knocked the non-fiction food-world over backwards. This delicious casserole dish will make you feel even better than that fairy tale hero that you always dreamed of becoming.

#### **Ingredients** (for 24 11-oz servings):

2½ gals (10 lbs) potatoes, chopped  
3 qts (2 lbs) cabbage, chopped

2-3 qts (2 lbs) broccoli, coarsely chopped  
2 qts (2 lbs) leeks, cleaned carefully, chopped (or onions, chopped)  
1½ cups butter  
3 cups milk  
1½ qts cheddar cheese, grated  
1 tsp nutmeg  
1½ tbsp Dijon mustard  
1 tsp prepared horseradish  
Salt and black pepper to taste

When you are ready to put the glass slipper on this casserole princess...

1. Boil the potatoes in salted water until tender. Drain.
2. Steam or blanch each vegetable until barely tender. If using onions, lightly sauté or sweat them until translucent.
3. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
4. Mash the potatoes with the butter, milk, and 2 cups of cheddar cheese.
5. Stir in the vegetables and seasonings, adjusting for salt and pepper as needed.
6. Pour the filling evenly into three lightly oiled pans. Top with the remaining cheddar.
7. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes, covered, and for 10-15 minutes, uncovered.
8. Cut each pan into 8 servings.

*Buen Provecho!*

## Inspirational Impressions

### Change the World

*“Let the **world** change you, and you can change the world.”*

**Motorcycle Diaries** movie tagline (based on the book by Che Guevara)