

Rancho Mastatal Updates

February 2010

With a renewed commitment from TYLER, SPARKY, SUCIA and others we're going to do our best to get back on track with our newsletters. There's certainly no lack of topics to write about around here these days. And for that matter no lack of energy. Time is what we oftentimes don't have enough of. With the Cork Fest just around the corner, groundbreaking of the Community Learning and Sharing Center merely weeks away, and the Yestermorrow Course coming at us fast, we've got our plates more than full right now. We were fortunately able to get away to the beach to Esterillos Este for a few days in



Portrait of our dear Cururú?, March 2002

photo by Delfino Cornali

March in an effort to recharge our batteries and have some fun in the sun as a group. It was wonderful, as always. We're now more prepared than ever to delve deep into our projects with the month or so that remains of the winter internship. It's been a whirlwind and hard to believe that it's already starting to wind down. April and May will be quieter than usual without SUSAN and her class from the University of Washington. We're planning to take advantage of the fact that we'll be without group to really crank out some work with much of our efforts going towards getting a roof on the CLSC, finishing the front garden renovation and working on the details of the new bio-digester toilet. It's a pretty wonderful time to be in Mastatal. Enjoy and let us know what you're up to when you get a minute.

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RM Program News: WEMT Students Take the Plunge

We were pleased to host AERIE Backcountry Medicine for their second Wilderness Emergency Medical Technician course here at the Ranch. As part of a two-month curriculum that spans both their time in Costa Rica and a month in Montana, the WEMT students delved deep into their studies and scenarios in Mastatal, with many a harrowing scream heard across the grounds throughout their stay. With a dozen Montana-sized men in the group, it was a big month for food prep to keep everyone satiated and energized, but their easy-going personalities made it a pleasure for the interns, many of who also practiced their acting as victims. WEMT students and Ranch interns also collaborated on two community service projects. While one group headed up to Jaime y Rosa's for some kitchen-related home improvements, another banged out a rocket stove for Lily's mother, an elderly woman who spends most of her day at the house cooking. Lily hopes that if this stove model is successful she may be able to have one up at the soda as well.

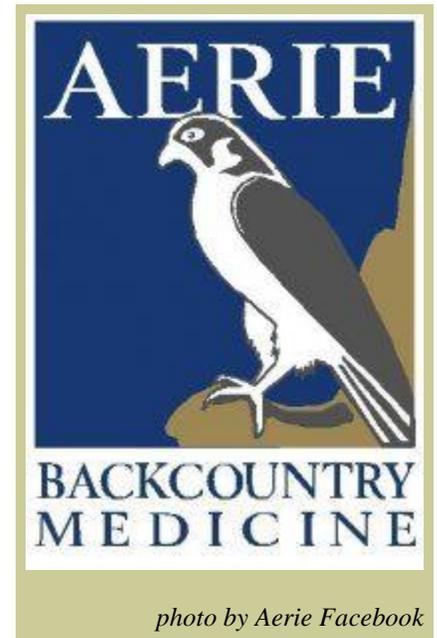
Indeed, with community health as a major focus of the course, the students also participated heavily in the annual free health clinic in the salón comunal. Many thanks as always to DR. GREG MOORE for his consistently dedicated care; he is an inspiration to many. We would also like to appreciate this year's course instructors, FERNANDO, DARCY, DAVE and ANDREA, for all their hard work, support and leadership. The rest of us seem to feel a whole lot safer with these guys around, and we feel spoiled to have the pleasure of the McEVOY family's presence for so long each year. We look forward to seeing their smiling faces again with next year's group, and we wish all this year's students the best in their continued coursework and training.

Building Report: CLSC and Filming Mastatal

Plans are still being made for the Community Learning and Sharing Center (CLSC), and we continue our search for additional funding to make the project become a reality. As part of this search, the Marion Institute sent Desa and me (Sparky) to Mastatal to create a series of short videos that will hopefully inspire people abroad to help with the cause.

Being part of this side of the project sounded exciting enough, but the reality of the past few weeks far surpasses everything I expected. Almost ten hours of the footage so far (which will be edited down to mere minutes) consists entirely of interviews with local *Mastataleños* and neighboring community members, and the conversations had before and afterward lasted much longer. My friends here in Mastatal, old and new, have me humbled with a shifting perspective. Spending every day in their homes, doing little more than listening, is a dream easily realized for anyone willing to take the time. And upon leaving, we are always thanked by our gracious hosts just for making a simple visit. One underlying theme that I have felt throughout this project that is so important to so many people here is the idea that shared time and company is a currency far more valuable than cash and coin.

Still, the reality of our world often necessitates money to make good things happen. Such is the case with the construction of the CLSC. While community members are doing their part in raising



funds on their own, this region simply does not have enough to make it happen without outside assistance. This video project has had many hands working on it (thank you Tyler, Tiago, Desa, Timo, Chris, and Mia), but its true beauty comes from the many voices that make up the community of Mastatal. The CLSC will finally provide a true space for these voices to all come together in a social and educational setting.

We will keep you posted on the construction of the CLSC as it progresses. Tyler has been spending endless hours on a design that combines the renovation of the old *Casa de Cacao* with an impressive new structure in front. A recent community meeting has everything moving forward and excitement growing. Timo and Tyler both spoke at length about the project, and it prompted more discussion and ideas from members of the local government, local business owners, community children, and many other interested individuals. Locals and gringos alike are ready to start getting their hands dirty to create this place for many activities and all people, this positive atmosphere that allows easier access to shared time and company.

Conservation Report: *Localvore Sábados*

In order to reduce the carbon footprint our food makes in traveling to our plate, we have recently added an exciting new tradition to follow Saturday Hoopsters: localvore meals. For these lunches or dinners, we are using ingredients that come straight from our own gardens with the exception of products like milk, cheese and butterbeans from our neighbors down the road. The push to use local food has spiced up old favorites of the Ranch, like coloring yucca bammies with the unmistakable orange hue of local palm oil and greens of basil, *culantro* and oregano. In addition, concoctions like taro pudding have become new favorites to those with more exotic tastebuds.

The localvore tradition has come to embrace fermented foods as well, such as dosas - sour fried breads made from fermented lentils (one of a few exceptions to the rule) - and whey lemonade from our kefir. The chefs have also allowed turmeric, the best of immune boosters, to express itself, leaving its shining yellow signature on many hands, plates, and smiles.

After preparing the first localvore meal, I watched months' worth of growing and a day's worth of work get scooped off of the serving table and disappear from people's plates in under 30 minutes. And that's fine. It is much stranger for me to eat an organic health food bar in under a minute, leaving behind a shiny silver packaging and CO2 bubbles that will linger uselessly and potentially harmfully for some indeterminate amount of time. Instead of pollution, our meal is embedded with a deeper knowledge of what goes into our bodies while offering opportunities to explore the history of our food and celebrate the beautiful land and our community.

Farm Facts: Garden Guild In Action

As alluded to in last month's update, we are pleased to bring you the newest addition to the Ranch newsletter, where we will keep you posted on the new happenings on the AG front. These days, it's hard to keep track of all the changes out there, with new raised beds, swales, trellises and nurseries popping up across the grounds. Under the guidance of FRANCES and NICOLE, the main house gardens are undergoing a major overhaul as part of a strong focus on producing food close to the kitchen. Nicole also teamed up with the Hernandez-Perez boys to construct a true *vivero* next to the carport, half of which has been converted to nursery space and storage. The transplant train is

running on full steam, both from revised beds and the new seed flats and racks, where dozens more seedlings await their turn at glory. Soil building has also taken precedence, with two piles of *tierra fermentada* cooking up with all sorts of goodness at the main house and the Choza. We can expect to see these piles brewing for weeks and months to come as we try to give some of the soils here a little boost.

On another exciting front, things are happening down at the biodigester, with a new *chayote* trellis and two contoured beds ready to receive bananas and other fruit-producing, fertilizer-loving plants. With the new toilet structure on the docket for the end of March, we look forward to enjoying the new view during our methane-making sessions.

Elsewhere, over by the animals, the new tree nursery is starting to take shape as the future food forest begins to open up down below. Bonnie and Alice have been chomping away at the brush, making way for what we hope to be a mixed orchard of fruit trees, bamboo and perennials in the years ahead. Indeed, the goats seem happy and healthy in their new home, and continue to bring joy to many, especially SOLEDAD.

Many thanks to all the earth movers, designers, planters and waterers for all their hard work and dedication. We look forward to watching the revolution continue.

Community Stories: Cururú

Our dear friend and companion Cururú, after 15-plus years of steadfast friendship and intrepid globetrotting, took his last breath on Tuesday, February 23 in the early afternoon with Robin, Sole and I next to him. Cu had been progressively getting frailer and less active over the years and made the decision to leave this life for the next after spending his last week on this earth living with his family at the Choza. With such an adventurous life, defying death on well over a dozen occasions over the past decade and a half, Cu made the most of his earthbound time, witnessing the death of many a fellow feline and canine,



Robin hanging with Cururu

before succumbing himself to the forces that left his body motionless and his heart still. Robin, Cu and I all met in the same week in Uruguay in December of 1994 where Robin and I were serving 2 years in the Peace Corps. Dancing in my local park one night late in the town where I worked I tripped over Cururú and his sister Mitai, both whom had been recently abandoned by a local family in my neighborhood. I fed them with an eye-dropper in those first days before they were able to open their eyes. After a few precarious days they began to gain their strength and get to know their new home only to get poisoned months later by a neighbor attempting to rid the barrio of strays. Mitai sadly died and is buried behind my former Peace Corps house but with the heroic help of a close friend Cu survived after a multiple-mile midnight bike ride in a backpack to a loving vet who was able to miraculously keep him alive. Cu then lived for 2 relatively peaceful years in the land of

sheep and cattle before Robin transported him and his best friend Jaquí to their new home in Seattle. After an arduous 10-day trip Jaquí was tragically killed by a car only minutes after getting released from his cage soon after touching down at Seattle's Seatac airport. Cu responded by spending the first three days in his new home on top of our Craftsman style house crying and howling towards Lake Union and downtown Seattle. It was a heart-wrenching experience for everyone. With time Cu finally settled in to his new surroundings and lived for 5 wonderful years between 2 homes, one in Wallingford and the other in Phinney Ridge, where he spent his days terrorizing both our neighbors and the local bird population. On two occasions neighbors attempted to adopt and rename him unknowing that he already had a home. We made the hard decision to uproot him one last time when we relocated to Costa Rica, unable to leave our closest companion behind. We were incredibly sad to say goodbye to our friends and home in Seattle but only shed tears when it came time to part ways with Cururú, who would be staying in Seattle a few months longer until we were able to navigate our way through the Western US, Mexico and Central America in our pair of Toyotas before arriving to our new home in Mastatal. Our good friend JACK VISCO accompanied Cu on a flight to Costa Rica shortly after we got settled in to our current digs. Cu lived out his final 8 years with us here in beautiful Mastatal. We vowed never to move him again. The hardest part about our yearly trips to the States to visit family and friends was dealing with the reality of not seeing Cu on a daily basis during our time away. In more recent years we would hope and pray that he would still be here upon our annual return. He seemed just to hold on this last time. Not long after our return he moved over to the Choza for the first time and spent his final days lounging around our home preparing for his goodbye. It was difficult seeing him so frail but we had some wonderful intimate moments in our last days together. I thought until now that I had shed all my tears for Cururú. We miss him dearly. His body rests overlooking the amazing forest on the edge of the Elmer Hohl Horseshoe Pit, a beautiful stone bench nearby and a Suriname cherry tree planted on his grave, so that a few years down the road we can tell Sole that her first pet and our first child helped to grow her favorite fruit. We had the most amazing ceremony to celebrate his life. Thank you to all that participated. Rest in peace Cu. We love you.

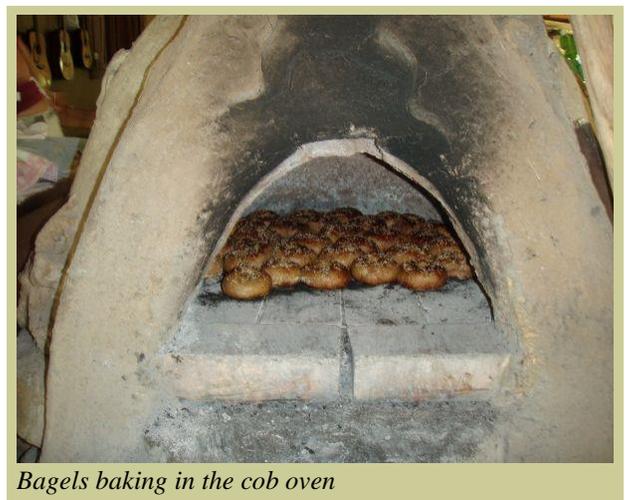
Intern/Guest Gossip: Bagel Night

Sung, by PIPPA, to the tune *Lady's Night* by Kool and the Gang

Oh yes it's bagel night
And the toppings are right
Oh yes it's bagel night
Oh what a night (oh what a night)

Girls boys y'll got one
A night that's special for all here
From Mastatal to Puriscal
It's baget night and yeah
The feeling's good.

Oh yes it's bagel night
And Greg toasts them right
Oh yet it's bagel night



Bagels baking in the cob oven

Oh what a night (oh what a night)

Comida Corner: *Piña Picante Asada*

This is a spicy grilled pineapple relish derived from the mind of world-renowned chef ALEX SAWATZKY, best known for his work on the "Purple Dragon."

2 cups pineapple (in 1" rounds)

½ bunch cilantro

3 whole jalapenos (seeds removed if less spiciness desired)

dash of vegetable oil

salt and pepper to taste

Grill pineapple rounds over medium-high heat (grill or hot, dry skillet on stove top) until caramelization begins (3-4 min). Flip, repeat on other side. Allow to cool. Slightly char jalapenos over open flame or in skillet. Combine ingredients in a food processor or blender and pulse until well mixed. Season to taste and serve as a salsa substitute. With anything.

F?tbl Follies: Peaks and Valleys

It's been a sporadic month for the Galacticos, who, after hosting a weekend of games but not actually taking the field themselves, showed up for a handful of mediocre outings in San Vicente, Vista del Mar and Tulin. Unfortunately there were no reporters present at the first two encounters, and we thus cannot bring you many details from those matches. As for San Antonio de Tulin, both the men's and women's squads piled into Tiburon's bus for yet another midweek match-up under the lights. We arrived for a nice sunset and the women took the pitch as the stadium lights came on. Las Galacticas were pitted against an experienced and formidable squad in the Tulin ladies. The home team took a 2-0 lead with some strong play up front from their star striker. It was indeed a tough challenge for the Mastatal defense, but KATTIA held her ground at sweeper, while the Galacticas' own star forward, NICOLAI, put on her running legs and went to work. Her first goal was much like a scene out of a cartoon, she sprinting forward with the ball and 4 defenders trying to navigate through her dust cloud as she blasted one across the net. She added a second before halftime to equalize, and the Galacticas took a well-deserved rest to charge up for the conclusion. It proved to be an action-packed half, with both sides fighting hard for the go-ahead goal. It came in the final three minutes, when the ball skidded forward to Nicole and she plopped it over the keeper for the game winner. A pretty hat trick and a bigtime win for the Mastatal women.

The men, on the other hand, lacked some of the spunk witnessed in the women's game, and soon found themselves out of position and down a couple goals. Missing some key defensive players, it was a tough go for the Galacticos, who could never find a rhythm, falling to Tulin 5-3. Tulin having finally gotten their revenge, who knows if Mastatal will get another invite to play under the lights, but they'll certainly be looking for redemption if they do.

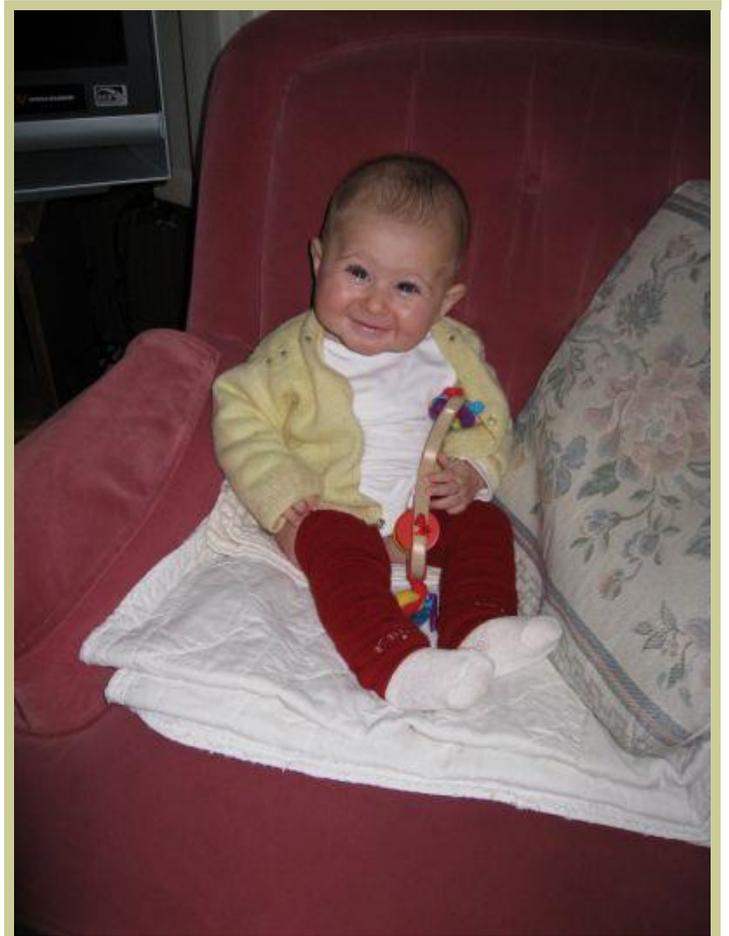
Inspirational Impressions: Beans

"Eat beans!"

--- Solé

Grandes abrazos,

The Ranch Crew



Sole flying diaper free