

Notes from the Jungle

El Camino Trae El Futuro

Last year, at about this time, there was a big reception in the Salon Comunal. Everybody from town was there...both communities of Zaragoza and Naranjal. It was to celebrate the official opening of the Mountain Route from Cuesta Grande to Zaragoza...twelve kilometers now with electricity and a good surfaced road so that the service could be maintained easily by the Electric Company. The continuation of the improvements had already begun heading West from Zaragoza through the mountains to the beach. Residents of Los Angeles de Garza were at the reception...they had just received their electricity, and the heavy equipment was scheduled to arrive soon to widen and surface that part of the road, as well. Just a year ago, people were thinking that within a few months, sometime before the coming rainy season, a new scenic route would exist going to Nosara through the Mountains.

Everybody waited patiently for the *invitados especiales* to arrive...they were true to form and arrived nearly three hours late. It was like being at a *futbol* game without there being any game. The Salon had been dressed up for this occasion...right and left there were video screens monitored by two laptop computers...pictures, in the form of a slide show, of all the people in town preparing for the event...cooking in the kitchen, decorating the Salon, moving all the benches from the Catholic Church to seat the horde of locals that were attending. It was all *pura propaganda*, a well orchestrated campaign...an Alliance between the Costa Rican government and the Bank of Germany...a program to bring electricity into areas that, at this late date and time, still had none. The Alliance also included the townspeople...they had to donate man-hours to assist with the road improvements, putting in the big drainage pipes and maintaining the *cunetas*, the area where the water flows off on the sides of the road.

One of the most impressive parts of the presentation was a school effort...each student had drawn a picture of the new road, snaking around within the context of the community and the results were displayed as a Mural. I had plenty of time to study the pictures...we seemed to be waiting indefinitely for the special guests to arrive. How many hours can you spend waiting before you totally lose your bloom? Finally, they arrived just as the crowd was lapsing into an irreversible coma. I was standing outside for some fresh air and could see their vehicles approaching. It was October...there were plenty of clouds overhead...the rainy season was still a big factor. Luckily there had been no rain yet but their late arrival was guaranteeing travel problems as the day marched on.

The government was represented by a woman, the Executive Director of the Alliance, working under the direction of the *Ministerio* of Public Transportation. A representative from the GTZ, the German Agency of Technical Cooperation was there...a Latin *mope* wearing a Guanacaste style *campesino* work hat...if you ever want to disguise yourself as a Tico...just put on one of these *sombreros*...but leave it home when you travel to San José, if you have visions of being on anyone's 'A' list. The Mayor of Nicoya was a guest as well...the three of them entered the Salon Comunal, the new tile floor, installed just weeks before, was shining, making the building infinitely more hospitable. There was a narrow aisle between people to walk and the special guests made their way to the front where they sat at a long table.

The Mayor introduced the Executive Director of the Alliance...she gave the crowd a full accounting of the project, reading the numbers from her worksheet...a total of 274 million colones had been invested in the road...about a half a million U.S. Dollars. She continued to give a breakdown of that figure...half had come from the Bank of Germany...almost the other half from the *Ministerio* of Public Transportation and the local Nicoya Municipality. Fourteen million colones had been contributed by the communities...seems like a lot of money from three communities that have very little in their "municipal" coffers...where did they find twenty five thousand dollars to pay their share? Did they all trade their part for sacks of oranges, coffee beans or *limones*? Maybe it was the sum total, the monetary value of the personal man-hours that were devoted to the completion of the First Phase of the road work? I don't know. I got the whole breakdown from the local newspaper, *La Voz de Nosara*. When I was there, all I heard in the din of this large space, with everyone just chatting away...all I heard was *milliones colones, milliones colones, milliones colones*. Once the financial audit was over, the *La Directora* introduced the guy from GTZ. He explained the concept of the project...to open up this naturally beautiful area for Tourism and he eloquently said, *el camino trae el futuro*...the road brings the future. Isn't that always the truth? And how it also improves the whole quality of your life...being able to move around without always making a gigantic effort or destroying your vehicle.

At the end of 2005, while driving from Nicoya to Nosara, I noticed a huge pile of electric posts lying off to the side of the Cuesta Grande entrance to the Mountains. The road up to Zaragoza from Cuesta Grande, at that time, was still a nightmare...but the prospect of electric service guaranteed future improvements. I knew then what the *mope* from GTZ was saying, *el camino trae el futuro*. The Bank of Germany had been involved in resurfacing the road that went to the new Regional High School that I helped build in Santa Teresa, a short distance away from Nosara Centro...I knew about their Alliance program with local communities and I realized that this pile of posts lying at the entranceway to Cuesta Grande

was part of a larger project...to improve the whole quality of electric service to Nosara Centro and the Beaches, while at the same time, bringing 'light' to the people in mountain areas that were still living without that basic requisite.

With the downturn in the economy, I was fearful that there would not be enough funds, at some point, to complete the project. That is the Latin American way...the way of most of the World right now. I had been politicking for the resumption of work from Zaragoza to the Beach, trying to insure that the route would offer an alternative for all vehicles going to Nosara, thus attracting more people into the area. I had been talking to Saturnino Fonseca, the *Diputado*, the local elected representative to the government, equivalent to someone in the U.S. Congress, saying that the through road would also be an escape route from the beach in case of a huge tsunami or other natural disaster. I told him that governments that are not thinking for the safety of their tourists find themselves considerably embarrassed and recipients of lots of bad press...if anything bad happened and there was no thought for an escape route. I mentioned Thailand a bunch of years ago...Phuket...the giant wave exposed the weakness of the evacuation plan... there wasn't any...and the International Press lambasted the government of Thailand and there was no Tourism for quite sometime. At least, that's what I always say to scare the *políticos* so they don't abandon the road project.

I'm sure that the *invitados especiales* were glad to be back in their cars and heading away from this remote mountain hamlet...the sky was darkening and I was sure they would encounter heavy rain before they arrived back in Nicoya. By the time that I arrived back at my house, I could see rain already happening in the Northeast...exactly where they were heading. They were all probably thinking...what a trip to the middle of nowhere...good thing that there's at least a good road coming and going. There's always a good road by the time this group arrives...they always arrive at the end to cut the ribbon.

©Howard Kramer November 2010...author of "**Matasapo, Mister Yamaha and other Jungle Tales**", available in hardcover, only locally, or as an ebook from Amazon Kindle, Sony, Apple, Kobo, Diesel, Barnes & Noble or Smashwords.

Contact: zgopress@gmail.com