

January 10, 2009

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Morning Meeting at Las Lajitas with Community Leaders

Today started bright and early with a visit to the weekly morning meeting at Las Lajitas. A few members of our group went to thank the community leaders and donate some seeds we brought as a cross-cultural exchange. As a sign of appreciation, our class provided the cooperative with seeds that will hopefully help to expand their crop varieties and agricultural products. All of the seeds are heirloom varieties meaning that seeds can be saved from each generation so that new ones do not need to be purchased. Las Lajitas already does some seed saving, so we are hopeful that the farmers will take an interest in preserving the varieties we brought from the US. One potentially exciting “intercambio” with relation to our seeds gift is a selection of lettuce, radicchio and endive seeds that can be seeded for mescaline mix. This popular blend of greens is a popular (and financially lucrative) crop in the US. Who knows, maybe Venezuelans will develop a taste for this American favorite!



It was wonderful to hear how thankful they were for our interest in the cooperative and our ability to pass on our experiences from this week to other Americans.

Quebrada hike



After returning from the cooperative meeting, part of our group fortified themselves with our last Casa Campesina breakfast and took off for the Quebrada. The Quebrada is the ravine created by a stream cutting its way down the mountain (the same stream that we hiked to the source of a few days earlier) The hike itself was a bit more mild compared to some of our other adventures but the views of the countryside and the ravine were just as spectacular. We found ourselves at the river's edge looking at a waterfall and a pool of some of the coldest water of the trip. So of course, we jumped in.



Tamanangue



After our refreshing hike to the quebrada, we joined the community of Monte Carmelo for a celebration called “Tamangue”. This included a theatrical performance by local musicians and dancers to honor a *patron saint*. The dance motions told traditional stories that were recited by the musicians. The women performing danced in colorful yellow dresses with swirling skirts that emphasized the movements of their dance. The men performed with swords in an energetic display of choreographed battles. The music for the dance was a little bit peculiar. Steven explained that the style of the singing was “very Venezuelan” and very unique compared to the singing traditions of Venezuela’s neighbors. The sounds are made in the back of the throat and sound little like a language and more like a ritual hum.

There we also got to socialize with our new friends from Monte Carmelo, while we enjoyed the jolly atmosphere.





One of the women who helped prepare our meals at the Casa Campesina invited us to attend her nephew's birthday party. Most of us arrived just in time to watch the piñata break open and the joyful screams of kids as they scrambled for candy. After that, music broke out and some of the group tried their hand (or feet in this case) at salsa and other forms of dancing.

Following this party we then made our way to another dance event, a quinceñera, which is a sort of coming of age party for a young girl turning fifteen years old. There, we got to see the birthday girl in her lovely white dress as attendees socialized and danced to more Salsa and Reggae tone (the favorite music genre of the younger generations).

We ended our night hanging out on the porch of MonCar, the women's co-operative we had visited on Wednesday. We stayed the night here for a change of scenery and to make our departure more efficient in the morning (to avoid hiking down the hill at 6am). We were all tired from our dance lessons, and finished the night playing cards and listening to Matt play some music on his guitar. We fell asleep to the sounds of Monte Carmelo, speeding cars and lingering guitar chords.

