

Hola! We have had three mountain-top experiences in the past 10 days...it will take weeks/months...even years to comprehend how life-changing these are! Here are some high-lights:

San Gerardo de Rivas (Peréz Zeledón). With only one minor glitch, all 13 of us arrived at Casa Mariposa on Saturday the 15th coming from 4 departure points. With the restaurant expertise of Mercedes - Lineth's (AVS Administrative Manager) mother-in-law — we had superb meals to nourish the hikers and support team! On Sunday, most of the crew did an 'acclimation to 5000 ft above sea level' hike in the Cloudbridge Reserve <https://www.cloudbridge.org/>. BTW, we whole-heartedly recommend Casa Mariposa <http://www.hotelcasamariposa.net/home.html>. This whacky whimsical guesthouse had the perfect location (50 mtrs from the trailhead) and ambiance for us, sprinkled with Jill and John's hospitality and guidance for arranging a myriad trek details!

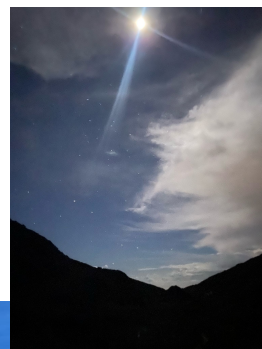
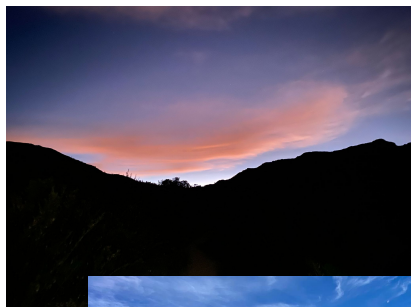
Santa Maria de Brunca. George and I connected with Canadian and Costa Rican Rotarians, an hour south of San Gerardo, to celebrate the final phase of The Rotary Foundation Global Grant project: *Rainwater Harvesting and Firefighting Capacity Building* with the local communities, firefighters, and regional conservation agency. They had the ribbon-cutting event for the fire tower on top of a high ridge overlooking Indigenous territory, government borderland and valley communities in this section of the Talamanca Mountain range.



Costa Rica fire management practices and personnel were helpful with the firefighters in Alberta Canada in 2024: an unexpected benefit of this international partnership. There's lots to learn about the practice of burning cropland before planting and nature's wildfires which easily spread during the dry season with the strong winds and extremely rugged terrain. <https://www.sinac.go.cr/EN-US/manrecurfor/Pages/manejfuego.aspx>. Prescribed burnings and other practices are part of the project to document impacts on crop production and reduced loss of woodlands.

Cerro Chirripó. Monday's final preparations: required check-ins with the national park office to get our reserved permits and the basecamp staff for our meals and transporting our stuff sacks with warm clothes for the summit and overnight supplies for the unheated lodge. Daypacks with water, energy bars/snacks, warmer layers, first aid supplies, ID, whistle, headlamps, etc. were readied. Then a good night's sleep to be **on the trail at 5am on Tuesday, 18 March for the 14.5km hike with a net 6,100 feet of elevation gain** (with the up/down of the trail it's more!). It was a *long day* with an unprecedented cardio-pulmonary workout! The lunch plates waiting for us replenished energy, albeit cold. Supper and decision-making about starting the final ascent (5.1km) sorted out with 3 starting at 4am and 7 after breakfast ~6:30am.

The summit experience. Brilliant moon-lit night sky with sparkling stars/planets and water spray icicles on a section of bushes, stunning sunrise colors filling the gaps between the mountains, and the rocky summit rising up out of the paramo....breath-taking at 12,533 ft



above sea level. Rock scrambling 101 would have been helpful training! Regardless of our lack of experience or level of fear, fellow hikers' encouragement got us up to the peak....**a once in a lifetime moment and a celebration of Agua Viva Serves' mission to bring clean water to remote communities in northern Costa Rica...they did a video to include the whole AVS team in this experience..if it doesn't work here, check AVS on faceBook and instagram!**



Then there was the descent! Those who left earlier to summit had a cold breakfast back at basecamp, but were rewarded with almost all 19.6km in daylight; those who had more sleep and a hot breakfast before summiting had a headlamp expedition for about half of the descent arriving at the guesthouse between 9-10pm. No leg or lung was left untouched on this climb!

What was truly unifying was sharing how we felt about the experience. We each described how others had inspired and motivated us even with our inner doubts and fears. It was humbling to express our vulnerabilities and uplifting to know that the courage and strength we gave each other was gratifying. Our lives have been changed with this deep appreciation of each other's presence on this wild, crazy adventure! **And we are grateful to friends and family for support of this challenge and for donating to AVS's mission (www.avs.ngo). It means so much to us!**

Thumbs-up gratitude to you from the AVS Chirripó Challenge team: Fran, Lineth, Omar, Bayron, Mercedes, Bob, Kent, George, Tim, Joanne, Jo, Jose, Nancy. >>>>>

Rancho Mastatal and La Isla Finca. After the AVS team + Bob, Kent, and Tim left for SJO and Los Chiles, George, my sister Joanne and I absorbed the silence then visited the 2023-24 climate change project the Ithaca Rotary Club sponsored with Rancho Mastatal. **It has surpassed expectations in produce production and demand exceeds the supply.** The fruit trees along with yucca and pineapple plantings demonstrate multi-culture regenerative agriculture. La Isla is a bit of a high hill so we were again feeling a sense of awe not only with the view but especially with the entrepreneurship and success of this project! While *only* 1000 meters above sea level, the rugged mid-elevation territory borders on the National Park Cerro Cangreja: <https://costa-rica-guide.com/nature/national-parks/la-cangreja-national-park/>



Our extra week concluded with seeing Kara Breedlove, St Paulian now teaching at GSD International School in La Guácima on the outskirts of Alajuela and a 'down memory lane' overnight in the heart of Alajuela where Nancy first experienced Pura Vida blessings as a Rotary Exchange student! **May you open your hearts and embrace this special Tico spirit! Blessings, n & Jorge**