

Everyone Always Says Hello

As you walk along the dusty road that is the artery connecting the seaside village at Playa Junquillal to the rest of Costa Rica, everyone always says hello. Greetings are exchanged as you make your way in the quiet light of early morning or evening, in the bright heat of mid-day, and in the soft dark. "Hola," you hear, "Buenas Dias," " Buena." Like the almost uniform pride most Costa Ricans feel in their country's commitment to peace and the choice of health care and education over an armed military force or a network of well-paved roads, in the countryside at least, a gentle courtesy seems almost endemic. And so, as you walk the road, inured to the dust of passing cars and motorcycles, horseback riders and cyclists, if you raise your eyes and exchange glances or a smile, the greeting will follow. Somehow you feel less like an outsider.

At least that is how it was in early January this year when a small group of students and faculty affiliated with the University of Vermont flew away from the tsunami-shocked and grieving world to land in that region of Costa Rica. Their destination was the Pacific coast of the province of Guanacaste; their goal to attend a course entitled Ecological Restoration and Entrepreneurship. Thirty-three students, most but not all majoring in environmental studies or business, took part. For two weeks they and their instructors lived in an enchanted, almost surreal setting where little to no news of the rest of the world reached them. They saw few headlines. Telephones were rare and unreliable. Access to television and radio was limited to non-existent. While nations and families were mourning and the international community scrambling to assemble and deliver aid to the victims of the disaster, the isolated students and their instructors grappled with the problems of a compellingly beautiful corner of the world known as the Rio Andamojo watershed.

That the students not only worked but worked hard in such a setting ought to have earned them several credits toward their degrees. The course was held in a small hotel about a hundred yards from a wide beach,

Playa Junquillal, where the waves roll in incessantly across the vast blue Pacific to break on reef and sand. Our makeshift classroom was the open sided dining room of a small hotel. To make themselves heard, speakers had to compete not only with sounds from the kitchen but the roar – and the lure – of the surf. Adding to the ambient racket, a restless and sporadic wind rattled palm fronds, boat-tailed grackles whistled and chirped, parrots screeched, dogs barked, three foot long iguanas thrashed around on the tile roof and a troop of eponymous howler monkeys frequently chose class hours to stage their lengthy harangues.

Undaunted, course participants applied themselves to their work. The Andamojo watershed had been selected for study because the surrounding area of Guanacaste is undergoing rapid development. To the north and south tourist attractions have transformed parts of the coast into tacky tropical replicas of Atlantic City. For the last two years several planeloads of passengers a day from North America and Europe have been flown into the once sleepy now expanded airport in Liberia. The window of time in which to protect and preserve the loveliness of the Andamojo region is fleeting at best, but that was what the course participants were there to attempt.

It was the second year a course addressing the combined subjects of ecological design and sustainable business had been taught in that locale. This was the brainchild of Vermont entrepreneur Will Raap, whose business ethic is based on the "triple bottom line", meaning equal attention to people, planet, and profit and It is part of an intended, ongoing multi-year program for environmental restoration and sustainable development in the Rio Andamojo watershed. The idea of a course focusing on the watershed was the result of a conversation Will Raap had had the year before with Dona Abigail, a reigning matriarch of the community who owns and runs the popular Las Tucas restaurant. When he asked her what changes she would most like to see in her lifetime, she responded that would like to see the rivers once again running the year around. Currently that seems unlikely given the going trends, there and elsewhere.

Will Raap opened this year deliberations with a brief report on the gravely deteriorating state of the global environment, pointing to swelling populations, dwindling resources, shrinking harvests, erosion and desertification, inadequate water and energy supplies and climate change as posing unprecedented present and future problems. His state of the world summary was immediately followed by one on the state of the watershed by ex-patriot American Tom Peifer. As founder and director of the locally based El Centro Verde Agroecology Institute, he has been developing and applying permaculture and sustainable agriculture solutions for the region for over a decade. El Centro is a small-scale model of

ecological solutions that could be applied to much of the watershed.

Tom Peifer reiterated a story we had heard from the local elders the year before and were to have retold many times again. Although cattle ranching began in Guanacaste early in the last century it was the building of the roads in the late 1940s that brought profound change to the area. It then became possible for trucks to penetrate the dry land forest, cut the trees for lumber, and haul them away. In response to the growing American market for inexpensive hamburger, much of the cleared land was subsequently turned over to cattle. Cattle growers planted hardy but invasive jaragua grass from Africa for grazing their herds. Seasonally green or tawny but hauntingly beautiful as it waves in the wind, jaragua has usurped native grasses as well as early succession second growth shrubs and young trees. Without trees on the land the water table fell and the dry seasons between the rains grew longer and hotter. The rivers dried up for part of the year. Replacing forests with cattle pastures washed heavy clay soils from the hills down to the valley floors where, like cement in an urban area, they formed a non-permeable layer over soil, making the richer bottom lands less accessible and obstructing river and aquifer recharge. As these changes took their course a once self-sufficient farming people began to lose their independence and traditional way of life.

There is no question that the Rio Andamojo area is on the brink of major change. Although the first tourist hotel dates back to the 1970s, tourists are now discovering Guanacaste in droves and development, already well begun, is inevitable. Construction jobs and work in the resorts has replaced agriculture as the dominant source of employment and few of the young people have much interest in farming. Most of the food is now imported. The arrival of surfers in significant numbers brought drugs into the area followed, inevitably, by crime. The question posed by the course was how could we apply our collective knowledge of ecological restoration and entrepreneurship to protect the extraordinary beauty and resources of the area while creating a model for a sustainable regional economy and decent livelihoods for the local people.

It was noted, however, that our high hopes for the sustainability of the watershed or any Central America ecosystem are overshadowed by a proposal that would in essence be a southern extension of NAFTA – the North American Free Trade Association – currently entitled the Plan Puebla-Panama or the PPP. Introduced by Mexican president Vicente Fox, the World Bank backed Plan would extend from Puebla, Mexico through Southern Panama. The idea is to transform Mesoamerica, into a Free Trade/industrial corridor. To transport the cheap, factory goods to be produced along the corridor, the plan demands the construction of two major highways along the Caribbean and Pacific coasts. It further calls for numerous connecting roads, the excavation of deep water ports, the construction of railroads pipelines, maquiladora zones, high-tension lines and as many as twenty-five hydroelectric dams, which would drastically alter as many watersheds.

In marked contrast to such schemes for the industrialization and globalization for this unique part of the world, Robert Costanza of the University of Vermont advocated more sustainable possibilities for this and other ecosystems. “Ecosystem goods,” he has written, “(such as food) and services (such as waste assimilation) represent the benefits humans derive, directly or indirectly from ecosystem functions.” Defining natural capital as “a stock of materials or information that exists at a point in time,” he cautioned, “because ecosystem services are not fully accounted for in commercial markets or adequately quantified as comparable with economic services and manufactured capital, they are often given too little weight in policy decisions. This neglect may ultimately compromise the sustainability of humans in the biosphere. The economies of the Earth would grind to a halt without the services of ecological life support systems.”

The role of entrepreneurship in sustainable economics is the specialty of Karel Samsom. “Entrepreneurship”, he maintained, “is the process of creating value through new ventures using innovation. As such it is critical to conceptualizing an appropriate economy for preserving and restoring the Rio Andamojo watershed. Within the context of sustainability, innovation embraces the precautionary principle; stressing fairness, in terms of minimum health, safety, and human rights as well as environmental preservation. Entrepreneurial innovation requires a team that collectively represents characteristics essential to success. It is the entrepreneurial team, he stressed, that is most critical to a given venture. Failure, he emphasized, is usually due to human error or failed team work. Good ideas are likely to founder not through lack of creativity but from inadequate implementation. In considering a business model for engaging with the Andamojo economy, he advocated a careful assessment of local needs and realities. By looking at existing businesses and plugging existing leaks, it would be feasible to conceptualize new businesses that would foster local production, distribution and

job creation.

Shifting to an ecological perspective John Todd invoked the surrounding ecosystem and of all planetary life as a continuing legacy made up of untold numbers of known and still unknown components that have coevolved over time. Study of such ecosystems as a coral reef, a mangrove lagoon, a rain forest, a prairie or a lake can reveal what he called "nature's operating instructions." Once understood, such instructions enable practitioners to design systems for growing foods, purifying air, treating wastes, restoring landscapes, and bioremediating polluted bodies of water. Ultimately ecological designed technologies and processes can be used to redesign infrastructures for a sustainable world.

Continuing on the theme of restoration, ecologist Steve Apfelbaum defined ecological restoration as "a practical management strategy that restores ecological processes to maintain ecosystem composition, structure, and function." He pointed out that analysis of the costs of restoration and its benefits is very different from short-term cost-benefit analyses for commodity production, as the latter often does not factor in long-term loss of ecological changes and ecosystem deterioration.

To substantiate the considerable theoretical material, the course segued between lecture format to field trips and site visits. For our first site visit we were bussed to Tom Peifer's El Centro Verde. El Centro is a permaculture farm that is a testimony to the potential of Guanacaste in terms of sustainable land management. Key to Tom Peifer's successful management is his system of terracing the hillsides in contours that prevent rapid runoff and erosion during heavy rains. He also plants vetiver grass, which has proven excellent mulch, to further anchor the soil. In addition to the tree crops characteristic of permaculture including lumber harvests of teak and tropical cedar and many varieties of bamboo, he grows fruits, herbs, and vegetables, all with economic potential. Tom Peifer's approach to plant selection is experimental. He lets the hardiness and compatibility of the interplantings play a major role in the evolution of El Centro. He has also introduced chinampa agriculture to the area and alternates aquaculture in sunken ponds in the wet season with raised bed vegetable production in the dry.

Across the road and a wide pasture from El Centro, dappled and shallow between tree-lined banks, flows the Rio Andamojo. Standing or squatting in the welcome shade there we listened as Steve Apfelbaum explained how the history of the last forty years of land use and climate change could be detected in the structure and height of the river banks and pointed out the soil types revealed by flood derived erosion. Steve Apfelbaum's skill in reading a landscape with its ongoing exchanges between geology and hydrology, soil, water, and weather patterns became indispensable to our knowledge of the watershed, as was botanist Susan Lehnhardt's extensive knowledge of plants and their place and role in the ecosystem. Explaining the interactions of rain, wind, river, and soil particles, Steve rendered these Gaian processes palpably discernible. The Andamojo, we learned, through a small mangrove swamp at the southern end of Playa Junquillal. The mangrove estuary and wetlands, vital in their role as nurseries for ocean going fish and other wild life, were as much ten to twenty times larger before deforestation brought about silting and soil inversion in the valley.

Other site visits took us several long hot hikes, intended to acquaint us with possible approaches to reforestation. These treks, greatly enjoyed by some of us, reluctantly endured by others, were described by one unwilling participant as forced death marches. One landowner maintained that the pleasantly treed farm and hillside where we were walking had, over fifteen years, mainly reseeded reforested itself through a form of benign neglect. Apart from discouraging the persistent jaragua grass in the early days, he had done little else to create the thriving young forest. Although a professional forester accompanying us felt that more active management would have produced more species diversity with greater economic potential, the young woodland spoke silently but eloquently for the resiliency of the land.

Another long trek took us up a tributary of the Andamojo, the Rio Limonas, through a farm that revealed similar regeneration. Following the course of the river, we were able to observe more closely its intertwined history with the forest and the soil. Although the river was dry in most places, we came upon a few pools in which we spotted small fish. At one point Susan Lehnhardt found maiden hair ferns along the bank, indicating permanent moisture retention, At another, where the bank was sharply eroded, Steve Apfelbaum pointed out a pattern of small stones perched irregularly on vertical ridges, revealing periodic rushing water causing erosion down to the underlying bedrock.

From this time on the land, we were better equipped to appreciate the presentations of the Costa Rican visiting faculty. From professor and forester Carlos Morera we learned of the natural history of Costa Rica and of the years, beginning not long after World War II of alarming deforestation. He recounted the subsequent government decision during the 1980s reversing that policy in favor of reforestation. This

is now a significant component of Costa Rican forest management practices. The next morning economist Olman Segura Bonilla explained Costa Rica's practice of Ecosystem Environmental Services. In 1996 the government enacted the first forest law to create a system of Environmental Payment Services to protect and enhance the value of certain areas in terms of their scenic beauty, biodiversity, and conservation. This represents a process by which farmers can be rewarded for becoming involved in reducing global warming. The Environmental Payment Service provides a mechanism to pay landowners for improving the environment both locally and globally. In terms of forest management, this provides incentives within an interactive system of multiple benefits. Forest environmental services benefit the global ecosystem in terms of carbon fixation and retention as well as biodiversity. The preservation of scenic beauty and of water for multiple uses is an asset to the country and finally, the landowner stands to profit from yields timber and other forest products.

Also in 1996 Costa Rica became the first country to sign an agreement that exchanges debt equity for the preservation of nature. This involves reduction or partial forgiving of the national debt in return for preserving and monitoring the health of a given ecosystem. The original framework emerged from the 1991 United Nations Rio Conference on Development and the Environment and was subsequently implemented through the Kyoto Protocol. The refusal of the Bush administration to sign onto Kyoto and play a significant part in this effort to counteract climate change was noted more than once. As Al Gore observed at the time of its coming into effect in February, "There is with the Bush Administration an unreality bubble that will burst. The rest of the world, for the first time in a legally binding way, is beginning to confront the reality of the climate crisis. By choosing to stick its head in the sand the Bush Administration not only embarrasses the country when the world expects leadership from the US but it also puts our economy at risk by encouraging illusory decision making."

Through the infrastructure provided by the Kyoto Accord the forests of Costa Rica, for example, will sequester a percentage of greenhouse gases including carbon dioxide that are byproducts of Norwegian industry. Norway pays Costa Rica as much two million dollars, at ten dollars a ton, for two hundred thousand tons of carbon. Dr. Segura pointed out that such agreements link fiscal and environmental policy by sending signals to markets and providing monetary value for ecosystem services.

Having absorbed so much varied information in a short time, the students were understandably restless to get started on their own more tangible projects aimed at grappling conceptually with protecting and restoring the watershed. To facilitate this Marjan Van Den Belt led the class in a conversational Open Space process. This resulted in intense and productive discussion and enabled the students to decide on which project areas they would like to concentrate. They promptly settled into teams to work in their watershed restoration task groups. After several days of brainstorming, studying, making maps and computer models, interviewing local people, and consulting with the staff, the course concluded with task group presentations.

Having chosen the name, Amigos del Rio Andamojo, the first team to present had taken on the most comprehensive challenge, that of articulating a business infrastructure and economic base for the watershed. Amigos del Rio Andamojo, they explained, "is a dynamic non-profit marketing and local advocacy organization dedicated to the environment and sustainability through cooperative business and entrepreneurial alliances, community development, and ecological education — almost like an alternative chamber of commerce." They planned to seek start-up financing from government grants and micro credit and work to develop a sustainable branding strategy and business model for local enterprises.

The non-profit umbrella-marketing cooperative would nurture such local enterprises as a tree nursery, and homemade salsa and chileros production, already being incubated at El Centro Verde. The coop would establish standards for such products. When a given product met their standards, they would identify it with a recognizable symbol or brand that would raise its market value. It would then facilitate with outreach, distribution, and marketing, with each step contributing to job creation. It would also work in conjunction with programs in schools, churches, and other organizations to foster local pride and confidence in the region.

The second group demonstrated a similar affinity with the people and the region. Calling themselves Friends of the Watershed, their goal was to understand community needs so that appropriate restoration attempts could be selected and advanced. From getting together with some of the local young people around a bonfire on the beach, they had learned more of the needs and aspirations of the community. Educational opportunities after the first six years of school were lacking, they were told. Often young

people are not encouraged to go on to distant high schools.

The team's over riding idea, and potentially the most encouraging outcome of the course, was to affiliate the Andamojo watershed with the Water Keepers Alliance. This influential international organization could then declare the Andamojo a protected area, and to arrange for a Costa Rican river keeper to move to the community and become involved with the people and educate them about the importance of the river and its watershed. They had also identified an effective environmental action group, the Blue Flag alliance, which has a local leader and could help coordinate these efforts.

The name of the third group, the Turtle Stewards Cooperative, again had symbolic value, this time in terms of calling attention to the threat to biodiversity in the area. Globally, nationally, and locally all of the great sea turtles hover on the edge of extinction. Off the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, where a successful preservation program has begun to restore the population, the sea used literally to roil with swimming turtles. In our area of the Pacific coast, however, there has been a ninety per cent decline in Leatherbacks. The numbers are similar for Blacks and Ridleys. The situation at Junquillal is complex. The local people believe turtle eggs to be an aphrodisiac. Raiding the nests and selling the eggs is one of the more lucrative ways of generating some much-desired income there. As Tom Peifer relates in his article "Of Turtles, Angels, and Men," on the positive side, there is an Argentinean post-grad there by the name of Gabriel who has dedicated himself to protecting turtles who come ashore to lay their eggs on beach at Junquillal. He hopes to rescue the eggs, then incubate, and hatch them before returning them in protective custody to the sea.

The team showed considerable ingenuity in tackling the dual problem of turtle poaching and protection. Pronouncing the dilemma a false dichotomy, they suggested that a job be created and offered to one of the poachers. He would be paid not for the eggs he sold but for live turtles that were subsequently released. Other jobs could be created through a turtle cooperative whose members could also act as guards in protected areas. School programs and activities could be created around the turtle protection program. Funding would be sought through such conservation groups as the World Wildlife Federation, the United Nations Environmental Program, and Environmental Service Payments.

As was the case with the course the previous year, one of the most popular interest areas for many of the young men was a possible aquaculture venture. Earlier in the course they had encountered an American who was growing a popular native fish known as the guapote. The team considered this more environmentally and culturally appropriate than non-indigenous tilapia-raising operations already established in the area. They foresaw that their program would have to have dry and wet season strategies. Fish would be harvested at the end of the wet season and the ponds being converted to growing beds for herbs, another cash crop, in the dry. Feed for the fish would be caught or grown locally and would include insects, worms, algae, and other plant materials. Over time an aquaculture operation would draw attention to the advantages of restoring the watershed and fostering the running of the river in all seasons. Tom Peifer of El Centro Verde was enthusiastic about having the team install their aquaculture operation as soon as possible, Dona Abigail of Las Tucas was equally adamant that she wanted one – and soon. This would both enhance a local business and could serve the nearby river.

The Reforestation Group chose reforestation as their strategy for restoring the river, using maps to explain the details of such a program. Most of the streambeds, by law, are tree-lined. Noting this, the team indicated remnant areas of dry land forest that would be early candidates for protection and eventually would again become primary forest. They suggested a succession approach between forested, pasture, and agricultural land that could consist of multi-storied agro-forestry products that would require minimal harvesting yet provide some income. Other suggested revenue sources were eco-tours of the primary forest and a surcharge for ecosystem services. Starting with information gathering and a natural resources inventory, the actual implementation of the project would take up to ten years.

Another group elected to revisit Tierra Pacifica, the site of the previous year's ecological design session, to check on progress and to see if further improvements would be possible for the second phase of residential development there. They hiked the site and showed a map of the existing vegetation. Noting areas worthy of primary protection, they drew up an improved conservation design layout indicating building lots, roads, and hiking trails. Their design included conservation and reforestation plans, protection for the estuary, wildlife corridors, water retention, and erosion control. Their plan clustered building lots in such a way as to require much less road area at a significant saving to the developer and is likely to be implemented.

The Tierra Pacifica had a sub-group made up of one young woman with a keen interest in farming. She elected to design a community farm for one part of the site which, hopefully, could function as a bridge

between the new development and the existing community. This would be useful in view of the formidable new gate and fence that now send the opposite message. Her conceptual farm would be a model for community supported agriculture in the region and would employ organic and sustainable techniques, serving as a link between local people and the residents of Tierra Pacifica. She planned educational and exchange programs to bolster the local economy through job creation as well as develop such farm-grown value-added products as tortillas, juices, liqueurs, fish from an aquaculture unit, and honey and candles from the farm's beehives.

Two other students also elected to pursue personal interests. One of the young men became fascinated with Marjan van der Belt's explanation of the STELLA system for creating a mathematical model of the Andamojo watershed. Acknowledging that all the elements of the region, from soil molecule to human inhabitant were inter-related, he looked at a number of components of the ecosystem. In developing his computer model he factored in land use, the water cycle, the ecological and economic well being of the inhabitants, human and otherwise, governance, and business and entrepreneurial prospects. In doing so he demonstrated the conceptual usefulness of this form of modeling for not only understanding a given ecosystem or watershed, but for helping policy makers and other officials understand the potential impact of their decisions.

Yet another solo presentation came from a student who had worked with medicinal plants in another developing country and was eager to learn about the level of knowledge and practice along the Rio Andamojo. Using considerable ingenuity in her research she was able to talk to a number of local people. She found that as western drugs and remedies become more available, both the knowledge and the culture of medicinal plants are disappearing. In this she saw a link between environmental impoverishment and a loss of cultural history and uniqueness. She further learned that this has been accompanied by a decline in overall community health. She did find one woman who proved a repository of knowledge in the nearby village of Paraiso, but even her daughter had little interest in her mother's traditional healing practices. Her suggestions for countering this trend would be to integrate growing and knowledge of medicinal plants into the farm at Tierra Pacifica and to initiate projects in the schools. Value-added products from plants could find a ready market among eco-tourists and other ecologically minded visitors and newcomers to the region.

The final team to present had concerned itself with community outreach and education. Having learned that education available for the children was considered inadequate, the team reported that overall, young people generally find few incentives to go on beyond primary school. Many parents saw little relevance in the subject matter being offered and felt their young people would be better engaged in helping to support their families. Even more basic was the lack of funds for school materials, curriculum development, and transportation to secondary schools.

The team suggested joining forces with two local women, both of whom have strong leadership qualities as well as a committed interest in better education for their children. The team felt that watershed awareness should be integrated into the school curriculum at all levels through lesson plans and hands on projects and site visits. One such project could, for example, could have the children remove trash from the river. They also suggested that programs to teach English and hands on-experience affiliated with the Turtle Project, El Centro Verde, and Tierra Pacifica. Such programs could quickly make a difference in the quality of the education of local children and hopefully would have a trickle up effect, inspiring them to both continue in school and motivating them to become active in their community.

During our stay we got word of a concrete way in which we could help the community when one of the local leaders, a spirited young woman called Lily, challenged us to a volleyball tournament and compete with the local men and boys. Their roof of their tiny school, La Escuela de Playa Junquillal was in need of repair. If all the players chipped in for, as one student put it, a few days beer money, and non-players sponsored a team, we might raise enough to help them get started. Two o'clock on a Sunday afternoon was agreed on.

As the appointed time arrived a series of rare but merciful cloudbanks rolled across the sun. With Lily in shorts and baseball hat as referee standing on a ladder by the net with a whistle at the quick, the games began. Spectators – visitors and a locals – gathered around the volleyball court set in the lawn of one of the hotels, gathered beers in hand while relays of teams played hard and fast with high good humor. We sent in one all girls team, Las Chicas Calientes and several mixed. The Costa Ricans were all male. There was much cheering from onlookers as well as chatting as former strangers got to know one another. The young people kept at it until late afternoon when scorekeeper Lily, with a final blast on her whistle, declared the Costa Ricans the winners. Hopefully the real winners will be the school children

who will stay dry when the rains begin.

On the last day of the course the faculty met to grade the students' work and to review their assessments of the course. Almost all were somewhat nonplussed by their agreement on the truly impressive learning curve demonstrated by many of them. One MBA candidate, for example, had been transformed from being solely motivated by business values to becoming a dedicated environmentalist. Others became convinced of the futility of environmental idealism without a sound economic base. As for the student's evaluations, the faculty found the excellent category circled an unexpected number of times. It was, it seemed, a memorable learning experience for all of us.

The students left and in the unaccustomed quiet, increasingly persuaded of the possibilities for the watershed, a few of us who were left set out to learn more about who owned what parcels of land and whether it might be available, especially around the headwaters of the river. Through friends we achieved an appointment with a man who lived in the nearby city of Santa Cruz and was a member of a consortium of landowners in the hills near the headwaters. After an extensive exchange of phone calls we were taken to his home, a small bottle green house in a side street of equally cheerfully painted buildings. Parked in the shade of the miniscule yard, we left it to those proficient in Spanish, to pour over maps with the owner and learn what they could.

Over the course of the lengthy consultations, a large-eyed toddler, a boy of about ten, a pair of teenagers, a young man, and an elegant middle-aged woman emerged from the house and most of them were brought into the discussions. The traffic along the road, not more than a few feet away, was equally varied. Pedestrians of all ages strolled by calling greetings as it was still school holidays. Bicycles churned past as cars rolled along and trucks rattled by. As the negotiations continued we counted no less than four trucks loaded with handsome, grave-faced Brahmin cattle and two with horses. Cowboys rode by in twos and threes, their pride in their horses, their skill, and their way of life transparently evident. After more than an hour's discussion we learned that currently that almost all the land near the headwaters surface could be acquired for the right price – information we found both daunting and challenging.

Our time there came to an end all too soon. To many of the local people our departure probably meant little more than a change of faces in the little store, restaurants, and bars. Others who had spent more time us and had confided to us their hopes for the future may have wondered if, after so much talk of the area's potential, we would vanish with little or no lasting effects. The children would go on leaving school after sixth grade, the river would run dry for part of the year and their community would increasingly become dominated by successive waves of tourists.

Yet there is a strong possibility that some of our shared hopes could become reality. It will soon be decided, and the chances are good, whether the Water Keepers Alliance will select the Andamojo as a protected river. If a subsequent program were jointly planned by the local people and their prospective River Keeper that would serve the goals of both groups, then many of the ideas we talked of could begin to be implemented. As Costa Rica is, in many ways, a poster child of the international community, so the watershed of the Andamojo could become similarly identified as the poster child of Guanacaste. Then the people could achieve improved livelihoods, the forests would expand, the hills grow green and the river run clear perhaps, all year. And still along the dusty road, Costa Ricans and visitors alike would always say hello.