

# ATENAS TODAY



*Issue number 53  
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**ATENAS TODAY** is a free English language newsletter for the residents and potential residents of Atenas, Costa Rica. It contains informative articles and creative compositions submitted by our readers, and is distributed via email approximately once a month to over 200 email addresses. To get on the distribution list or to submit material, please send an email to Fred Macdonald at [fredmac222@yahoo.com](mailto:fredmac222@yahoo.com).

Compositions from back issues are archived by category on the Atenas Chamber of Tourism and Commerce website, [www.atenascatuca.com](http://www.atenascatuca.com). Click on the English version and then [Atenas Today](#) on the business page.

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## Directory of English-Speaking People in the Atenas Area

Atenas Today announces the publication of a new directory of the people in our English-speaking community. With each issue Atenas Today subscribers will receive an updated file containing the names and contact information of people who have chosen to be listed. Simply download the PDF file attached to this Atenas Today email and print it or save it on your computer.

If your name is on the list without contact information, it is because you are a subscriber to the newsletter, but have not authorized the publication of your email address or other information. To add or correct data please send an email to [fredmac222@yahoo.com](mailto:fredmac222@yahoo.com).

## Linea Vital to the Rescue Again

As another reminder of the importance of Linea Vital to our community, here is a partial copy of a letter they recently received. Support this vital service and protect yourself by visiting them and becoming a member. Only \$20 a month gives you health services at a special rate and ensures that their ambulance can find your house in an emergency.

4 May 2009

To: Clinic Linea Vital  
Atenas, Costa Rica

From: Bill Miller, 1375 Simpson St.,  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55108 USA

On the morning of February 16 when I began hemorrhaging from my nose at my brother-in-law's home in Desmonte, I tried, and my relatives tried, to stop the bleeding, but without success, partly because I was taking an anticoagulant prescribed for another condition. I began to think I might bleed to death. Later at the CIMA hospital in San Jose, I learned that I lost at least 2 liters of blood. As I was losing consciousness in Desmonte, I heard someone say that an ambulance and paramedics were on the way to help. That information lifted my spirits enormously and gave me needed hope and comfort.

I am writing to say a heartfelt thank you to Dr. Candy Midence, Andres Diaz, and Jorge Morera at the Clinic. My wife Jocelyn and I will always be grateful to you for your lifesaving efforts. We wish all of you the best for the future in your professional and private lives.

With much gratitude,

Bill Miller

Jocelyn Muggli

## Atenas on My Mind



by *Patrick J. Brown*

I don't remember when I first got the idea that I wanted to live in Costa Rica. It may have been when U.S. President George W. Bush appointed a North Dakotan as ambassador to Belize that I became intrigued with Central America.

The more I read about the area, the more drawn I was to Costa Rica: a democracy, no standing army, a variety of temperate climates, located between the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. Sounded like my kind of place.

I tried to convince my wife, Sue that we'd move to Costa Rica after our youngest daughter graduated from college. Never one to get overly enthusiastic about leaving her tight-knit Norwegian family, Sue would usually respond with silence, sometimes with a snort.

A few years after we moved from Bismarck to Fargo, North Dakota, a series of events happened that drastically changed our lives, and my life, forever.

### **Life Changes Forever**

A highly respected and talented addiction counselor, Sue started her own addiction treatment center in 2000, which took all of her energy and time. A couple of years later

her mother was diagnosed with lung cancer and moved into our home in Fargo to be close to the Roger Maris Cancer Center, where she was being treated. She died six months later.

Two-and-a-half years after that, Sue was diagnosed with a rare brain disorder and Lou Gehrig's Disease (ALS). I cared for her in our home with the help of Hospice and some great relatives, neighbors and friends. She died in June of 2006. Five months later I had a heart attack. Stress, the doctors said.

In December of 2007, I lost my copywriting job in advertising that I'd held for 12 years. Four months and one completed screenplay later, before my severance package ran out, I was recruited to come back into the oil business as a petroleum landman, a job I had held in the early 1980s.

So here I am in mid-2009, a widower with three grown daughters, three small grandsons, two Boston Terriers, IRAs that have tanked, and a job that requires constant travel, trying to figure out what I want to do when I grow up.

During my journey through the mind-numbing grief over my losses, I have done much soul searching. I have decided that I'm a survivor, and as I consider my options, I keep coming back to my dream of living in Costa Rica. But where?

That brings me to my decision to move to Atenas, the city that National Geographic Magazine says has the World's best climate.

### **How I am Preparing for Atenas**

To prepare for my move, I have Googled Atenas, bought books on Costa Rica (I look immediately to see what each one says about Atenas), and I have taken a community education class in Spanish from a

woman who refused to speak English before, during, or after the classes. I also subscribe to “Atenas Today,” and last year I took a wonderful Caravan Tours tour of Costa Rica.

To become a member of the Atenas community, I belonged for a year when it needed start-up help, to Linea Vital, the city’s private ambulance and medical service. I will become a full member the

month before I step foot on Costa Rican soil. I also donated money to help the Atenas mudslide victims.

What’s next? For the time being, I continue to dream about life in Costa Rica and to work on my Spanish. Next January I am coming to Atenas for a month-long visit so I can get to know the town and its residents – expats and Ticos alike. I think this will help me discover for myself if my dream is realistic or if I’d be better off living in my oldest daughter’s garage.

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*Presidencia de la República  
Dirección de Prensa*

## **CR Multilingüe reaches out to English-speaking residents**

- **Resident Volunteer Program seeks to involve fluent speakers of English in national initiative to improve the language skills of Costa Ricans**

**Zapote, March 11, 2009** – Costa Rica Multilingüe, an initiative of President Oscar Arias Sánchez, is extending an open invitation to all fluent speakers of English residing in Costa Rica to participate in weekly conversation groups with people seeking to improve their language skills.

The initiative’s Resident Volunteer Program will pair fluent English speakers with Public Education Ministry (MEP) teachers, other professionals, and adult students. The volunteers and their partners will meet each week to give English-language learners a chance to improve their mastery of English, as well as their cultural knowledge – and to strengthen ties between Costa Rica and its expatriate community.

Marta Blanco, the Executive Director of Costa Rica Multilingüe, noted that the U.S., British and Canadian embassies have at least 33,500 residents registered from their countries. “If we

can involve only 5% of those residents in Costa Rica Multilingüe within the next few years, we will provide more than 16,000 new opportunities for English learning to the people of this country,” she said.

No teaching experience is required; Costa Rica Multilingüe will provide volunteers with instruction and tools to support their work with their conversation partners. Volunteers living in any part of Costa Rica are welcome to register.

To make the program a reality, Costa Rica Multilingüe will rely on the support of partner organizations to help publicize the program among potential volunteers – particularly within the English-speaking expatriate community – and English-language learners. The program will also depend on the willingness of local schools, libraries, businesses, churches or other organizations to donate space where the conversation sessions can be held.

### **Next Steps**

The proposal received an enthusiastic response at a preliminary meeting convened March 3<sup>rd</sup> at Casa Presidencial, with representatives of the expatriate community and other groups. Costa Rica Multilingüe is now registering potential volunteers via e-mail (see “How to Register,” below) and seeking sites for the sessions. A meeting for all volunteers will be held in San José in mid-April, with the conversation groups set to begin in mid-May.

Costa Rica Multilingüe also hopes to receive in-kind donations that will allow volunteers and their conversation partners to attend special events to further support the learning of English, such as English-language theater events, concerts or gatherings.

Costa Rica Multilingüe, which seeks to improve the communicative skills of Costa Ricans with short- and long-term goals through the year 2017, was launched on March 11, 2008, and marks its first full year of operations today. The program is preparing its annual report and will present it in early April.

### **How to Register**

Fluent English speakers interested in volunteering should register by writing to Costa Rica Multilingüe at [volunteer@casapres.go.cr](mailto:volunteer@casapres.go.cr). The registration email should include the following:

- Name
- Contact information (email and phone)
- Place of residence (and place of work, if applicable)
- Hours when available for volunteering
- Willingness/ability to travel outside area of residence for conversation group
- Information about professional experience/skills that could help us make the best pairing with a conversation partner (e.g. engineering, computers, the teaching of English or other subjects)

Individuals or organizations seeking to learn more about the program or donate space for conversation sessions should contact Costa Rica Multilingüe at the same address.

For more information please contact  
Costa Rica Multilingüe, Casa Presidencial  
2207-9485

## Our Columnists

### Never Make Assumptions !



by *Marietta Arce*

Some time ago, a friend of mine (Elise) was woefully sharing her disappointment with her housekeeper, Ana. Ana was a young Tica from the country who did not speak any English but my friend's Spanish was very good and they had been able to communicate pretty well. Ana's family was also responsible for gardening and general chores outside of the home. Ana's duties were limited to the indoor cleaning. My friend treated all her employees with respect, often providing little extras that helped her come to terms with the guilt she felt about having a housekeeper, a luxury she could not afford in Canada.

Elise had been disappointed many times in the past with employees who worked well for a few months and then began to slack off as they felt secure in their jobs. We all know that firing personnel (in Costa Rica) is an onerous undertaking for the employer and one that we all try to avoid if at all possible. When I asked Elise what the nature of her problems with Ana were, I was expecting it to be the usual story of silverware gone missing, broken

dishes, or wasteful habits. I was surprised when she confided that the young lady was simply unwilling to carry out some of the chores she was asked to do. The latest chore she neglected was cleaning the inside of the microwave oven.

I asked Elise what excuse Ana had given for not wanting to clean the inside of the microwave and Elise told me that she felt uncomfortable asking about it so she just ignored it and did it herself. Elise shared that Ana was good in so many other ways, she felt that it was a minor infraction and she should just forget about it. As a strong believer in communication, I felt it was my duty to point out that Elise was paying a salary and was justified in her complaints and should simply ask Ana what the problem was.

A few weeks went by and the situation continued. One afternoon, Elise arrived home late after running errands and picking up her daughters from their various activities. She was rushing to get dinner on the table and pulled out some leftover from her refrigerator to heat quickly so that the homework could get started early that evening. When she went to the microwave to reheat, she was confronted with the splatters of the morning's meal which she had forgotten to clean before she left for her errands. She was very upset when she went to bed that evening.

The following morning she greeted her housekeeper in an exasperated manner and confronted her about her unwillingness to clean the microwave. All the emotions that Elise had held inside came pouring out that morning and she said many more things than she would have on another occasion. It happens to all of us, especially when we bottle up little things for a long time.

Ana burst into tears and explained between sobs that the only reason she did not clean the microwave was because she had no idea how to open it and was ashamed to tell Elise. She thought it would be better to pretend she 'forgot' than go through the humiliation of letting Elise know that she had never seen a microwave before, let alone clean one. Needless to say, Elise burst into tears later that day too as she recounted the story to me. It was a moment of humility for her as she accepted that she never imagined that anyone would not have seen a microwave before. We both learned a valuable lesson from that incident; I know that neither of us will take some things for granted. I still shudder when I recall how my gardener mistook a freezer gel pack for one of those frozen gelatin pops. Fortunately, it tasted horrible and he promptly got rid of it but when I had placed it in his cooler, I never thought for one moment that he was unable to read.

Life is full of surprises, and I try to remember that for all our modernization, this is still very much a developing country, a beautiful one, but still developing!



never met a Catholic, a Jew, or a black person. We each told our own personal stories

## Missives from an Old(er) Feminist



by Diane Holman

### *An Elegy (A Reflective Poem, usu. Melancholy in Tone)*

In 1955, when I was 15 going on 16, I joined the South Bend, Indiana, chapter of the National Conference on Christians and Jews. As it turned out, our group of 20 or so persons focused our discussions on racial prejudice rather than religious prejudice. This suited me. I had been motivated to join the organization because of the prejudice I had seen directed at black people in my town, directed by my parents as well as by other white adults I knew. It seemed *wrong* to me to dismiss and disrespect people on the basis of skin color.

In 1965, when I was 26 and the mother of three young sons, I joined the Fort Wayne, Indiana, branch of the Panel of American Women. Each "panel" was made up of a Catholic, a Protestant, a Jewish and a black woman. We traveled several times a month to smaller, rural towns in northeastern Indiana, where most members of our audiences had (by their own admissions)

of encountering prejudice in our lives. Most of the time our listeners responded with warmth and understanding, which carried over to the coffee-and-cookies hour after our speeches.

In 1968, after having read The Feminist Mystique and become aware of the growing interest on a national level regarding women's issues, I brought up to my friends on the Panel of American Women the idea that we should consider speaking not just as women defined by religion or skin color, but as *women per se*. This idea met with a cool reception by my group of friends.

But I persisted, reading more and reaching out to other women, especially younger women, in the Fort Wayne community. Eventually, in late 1968, I found myself sitting in a basement meeting room of a Methodist church with a group of women intent on founding a local feminist group. Most of us were women with young children, all of us were readers and all of us had grasped on an intellectual as well as feeling level the inequality which women confront in American society. We sat in a circle and discussed names for the group. I suggested Fort Wayne Feminists. At first some of the women shied away from the "confrontational" sound of the name, but eventually we all agreed it was "just right". (Fort Wayne Feminists exists today, actively promoting the interests of women in the community.)

In 1971, I received a letter from Gloria Steinem. She was in the process of putting together a magazine for women called Ms. Magazine. I had apparently been nominated by someone in Fort Wayne for

inclusion in a feature in the magazine entitled "Lost Women", about women

who were working on feminist issues in communities across the U.S. I was flown to New York and put up with several other women from across the country in what I remember as the grand apartment of an activist in the movement. I soon found myself at a press conference, on a dais with Gloria Steinem and several others, addressing the press about my own story. I began: "I am Fort Wayne's oldest living feminist". (If I had only known in 1971 what "old" was....)

In 1973, in my first year at Loyola Law School, I sat in my first class of Constitutional Law, taught by an imposing older man named Professor Dibble. He began the class by evicting someone from the room for daring to show up with a cup of coffee in hand and asking another student what appeared to be a fairly esoteric question. Then he spotted me, an "older" student sitting in the middle of 60 other students, and asked me what I thought of *Roe v. Wade*. It struck me as I imagine a light taser might strike me. I had been out of the loop on feminist issues for the past eight months, serving as *ombudsman* for the City of Fort Wayne and preparing my family for the exodus from Indiana to California. But I *knew* in my bones what *Roe v. Wade* had done. And I responded quietly but firmly: "It's time".

The room felt electric. But Professor Dibble simply nodded and gave me my due.

So now it is 2009, and I am 69 going on 70, and you will understand my sadness, my deep sadness, over the murder of Dr. Tiller, who performed *legal* abortions, and the killing of the guard at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. You will understand my sadness at the deaths wreaked by an anti-choice, anti-woman male and an anti-Semitic male.

And you will understand my harsh repudiation of the hate talk of Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity, Glenn Beck and the other white males who think they are the only ones entitled to live in the U.S. I have spent my life saying to these men: **YOU ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES ENTITLED TO LIVE IN THE UNITED STATES**



parking lot for your security. Be sure to tip him for his trouble.

## Carara National Park *an outstanding natural area*



*by Lorna Smith*

Only an hour away from Atenas, “mas o menos,” by car or bus, Carara National Park offers exceptional opportunities to see Costa Rican native birds, wildlife and a huge assortment of plants in beautiful primary tropical rainforest and a variety of other tropical habitats.

To reach Carara National Park from Atenas you take the main highway to the beaches heading west out of town. You will travel through a windy mountain pass, and then descend towards the coast, passing through the towns of San Mateo and Orotina. Follow signs to Jaco, although you will not be driving that far. About 2 kilometers past the Tarcoles River bridge, you will notice the sign “Carara National Park”. This is the main parking area for the Park. Within Carara National Park, two separate trail systems offer access to intact primary forest and riparian, or riverside, habitat adjacent to an oxbow of the Tarcoles River. The trailhead for the Riverside Trail requires that you park in a different location back towards the bridge. The Park staff will direct you. There is a guard present at the

The trails rate as easy-to-moderate in effort required. Expect very muddy conditions on the riverside trail during the rainy season. Just wear your boots, and the trouble of navigating around or through the mud is well worth the effort. Early morning visitors in particular have a very good chance to observe wild Scarlet Macaws feeding on palm nuts not far from the trail and to hear and observe them flying overhead. What kind of sound does a wild Macaw make? Once hear, it is not easily forgotten!

The big-billed and beautiful Boat-billed Heron is another bird which is usually encountered along this trail. The herons have established nesting and roosting sites nearby. If you should be fortunate enough to see them, remain quiet and move slowly in order to allow them to nest or roost undisturbed. Notice their large eyes which provide excellent night vision for these largely nocturnal hunters. Looking out over the placid water, you will also notice slow-moving crocodiles barely visible at the water surface as they fish or hunt for frogs or any other small prey. The crocodiles encountered in the oxbow are not the river giants that can be observed from the Tarcoles River bridge. Mostly, they are young or sub-adults who fare better in this more protected environment away from the main river. Food is relatively plentiful for them and competition from larger more aggressive crocs is limited. Along the far bank of the oxbow you will also likely see Black-necked stilts, Roseate Spoonbills, Great Blue Herons, Green-backed Herons, and Bare-throated Tiger Herons. Look out over the water and you may observe five species of kingfishers ranging in size from the rare American Pygmy Kingfisher to the much larger Ringed Kingfisher.

White-necked Puff Birds, Barred Antshrikes, Bi-colored Antbirds, and Gray-

Anywhere along the trail you may also encounter Jacamars, Blue-crowned and Turquoise-Browed Motmots, several species of forest falcons, White-nosed coatis, White-faced Capuchin monkeys and Howler monkeys.

The Primary Forest Trail begins at the Park Headquarters. Whether you are planning to take this trail, the Riverside Trail, or both, begin your trip here where you pay your entrance fee. You may also want to consider hiring the services of one of the competent guides available at the headquarters. We particularly recommend Freddy Villarreal Acuña as an excellent bilingual naturalist and birder. Freddy and his wife also operate a small bed and breakfast nearby if you want to extend your trip to more than a day. Freddy is excellent at identifying plants, the calls of birds and animals you will hear, and can describe for you the myriad of ecological processes underway every day under the canopy of a primary forest. The trail winds past the huge buttresses of giant trees called “emergents”, meaning they are capable of out-competing other species of vegetation, taking advantage of a small opening in the canopy to soar above the other trees and forming the highest layer in the multi-layered forest canopy.

Here, in the deep forest you may observe certain shy species of birds, which make up the “antbird” contingent. Some of these birds specialize in following swarms of marauding army ants, not to eat the ants, but to take advantage of the insects and other small invertebrates that flee in panic before the swarm. In the jungle, army ants show no mercy. Anything small enough to overcome becomes their prey. As part of a mixed flock following the ants you may see Slaty Antwrens, White-whiskered and-

headed Tanagers. Chestnut-backed Antbirds, dot-winged antwrens and Black-hooded Antshrikes are everywhere. Three species of toucans can also be encountered along this trail, Chestnut-mandibled, Keel-billed and Fiery-billed. With a little bit of perseverance, you’ll see several species of Trogons. These birds are in the same family as Resplendent Quetzals, and are themselves very colorful. The Scarlet Macaws have nest trees here and there in this primary forest area and in nearby large stands of mangroves.

Very beautiful Green and Black poison dart frogs can be found here if you look carefully in the moist litter along the trails. Once you learn to recognize their buzzy calls, you’ll hear them frequently. Spider monkeys are more shy and less plentiful than their shorter-limbed cousins the Capuchins and Howlers. However, the lucky visitor may spot small and acrobatic troops of these primates feeding high in the canopy.

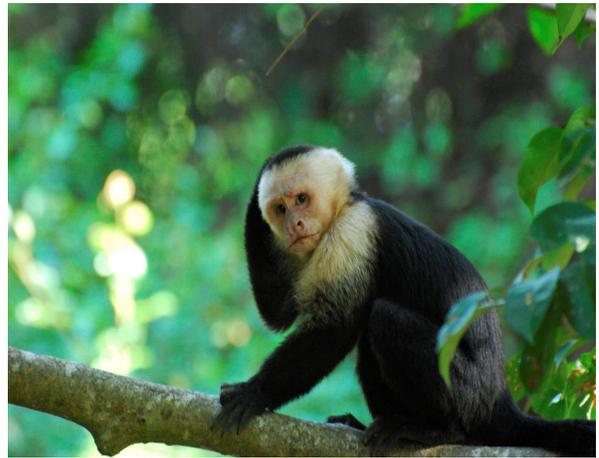
Carara National Park is not a park that can be explored and absorbed in a day. Go often. You will see different species at different times of the year and even different times of the day. You won’t be disappointed.



*Chestnut-backed Antbird*



*Scarlet Macaws feeding on palm nuts*



*Young Capuchin, or “White-faced” Monkey*

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## **Culture Codes**



*by Fred Macdonald*

Several months ago a German friend recommended a book to me called The Culture Code, by an anthropologist and marketing consultant named Clotaire Rapaille. My friend said this book had helped him understand why Americans acted the way they did, at least in comparison to Germans. I read the book and found it fascinating, especially given the fact that we live in a

community of English-speaking people who come from a variety of countries and cultures. (In this column I am using the term “Americans” to refer to people from the United States, since we do not have a word that is the equivalent of “Canadian” or “Costa Rican”)

The basic premise of the book is that our reactions to things and events are profoundly affected by the cultures in which we grew up, and that if you want to understand people or sell them something, you had better know the “codes” of their culture.

Granted it is always dangerous and unfair to stereotype a group of people, and the author acknowledges that there are many exceptions to his thesis. Nevertheless, real life results from marketing products in different countries have confirmed the importance of understanding culture codes.

A prime example is the experience of the toy company that sells Legos, the little keyed blocks that can be put together in various ways to make buildings, cars, space ships, etc. The company found that for some reason Germans bought many more Lego sets per capita than did Americans. And they found that whenever they changed the picture on the side of the box, sales in Germany increased dramatically.

It turned out that the Germans would follow the instructions to build the intricate structure in the picture, and then they would proudly display the finished item on a shelf. If they wanted to build something else, they would have to buy another box of Legos. The Americans on the other hand would use the Legos to make some crazy design, and then they would tear it apart and make something else.

The culture code in Germany for Legos is *engineering*. The culture code in the United States for the same product is *creativity*. Knowing this obviously makes a big difference in how you would market the product in the two countries.

Sometimes you have to dig a little deeper to discover the culture code. Take “love” for example. The author contends that the code for love in Italy is *fun*; in France it is *your partner’s pleasure*; and in the United States it is *false expectations*. (How depressing is that?)

What about food items? In the United States the code for “food” is *fuel*, whereas in France it is *enjoyment*, and in Italy it is its *family*. “Peanut butter” in the United States is *mother’s love*; in France it is just *another food*. “Cheese” in France is *alive*; in the United States it is *dead (pungent)*.

The “automobile” in the United States is *identity*; in Germany it is *engineering*. The “Jeep” in the United States is *like a horse*; in continental Europe it is *liberator* (from

World War II). “Money” in the United States is *proof of who you are*; in France it is an *unpleasant fact*. “Quality” in the United States is *it works*; in Japan it is *perfection*.

In the area of activities, “seduction” in Italy is a *game*; in France it is *natural*; in England it is *detachment*; in the U.S. it is *manipulation*. “Work in the U.S. is *who you are*; in France it is something to *minimize*. “Staying healthy” in the U.S. is *movement*; in China it is *harmony*; and in Japan it is *obligation*.

The “United States” itself has a different culture code in different countries. In Germany it is *John Wayne*; in England it is *abundance*; in France it is *space travelers*; and in the United State it is *the American dream*.

The list goes on. The culture codes of a people develop from major events in their history. The author contends that Americans are who they are because of their history of achieving freedom from persecution, of opening up the West, and of seeing themselves as the “savior” in two world wars. Characteristics that result from this history include the need to explore, openness to change, belief in second chances, focus on the ‘now’, and dramatic mood swings.

An interesting dinner conversation with a person from another country would be to pick something and talk about how different your culture codes are for that item. It will probably surprise you.

### **American Builder**

20 years experience building in Costa Rica. References and photos. Have architect to help with plans and permits if needed. Building in Atenas can be easy with the right team.  
Call Bill Enell 8812-0126 or 2446-4837

### **Private Lot on River**



This 5400 square meter lot is in Finca Zacatal, a 9 lot community located in San Isidro de Atenas, approximately 5 kilometers from town. Huge trees and a stream border the property, which is completely private with no other houses visible. Water and electricity is installed to the property line. Two other houses have been constructed in the community, and a caretaker house at the entrance provides security.

Asking price \$60,000.

Contact Fred Macdonald, 2446-0440, 8848-7632, fredmac222@yahoo.com.

## Mountain Cottage for Rent



Our newly remodeled two bedroom cottage is 5 kilometers from downtown Atenas on a private road. Great views of the valley may be seen from both the front and rear terraces. Trees and coffee all around, and there is a nearby river with a 30 foot waterfall. One bedroom contains a double bed, and the other a single bed. The living room has a small dining table, a sofa, and several chairs. There is a full kitchen and bathroom (shower only). A land-line telephone makes it possible to connect to the internet. Linens and kitchen utensils are provided, and optional maid service is available. There is a modern washer/drier in the attached bodega. Enjoy a variety of music from the CD player and the library of discs.

High Season Rates: one week, \$300, two weeks, \$400, four weeks, \$500

Low Season Rates: one week, \$200, two weeks, \$300, four weeks, \$400

Special rates for longer stays.

Call Fred at 8848-7632 (country code 506), or email [fredmac222@yahoo.com](mailto:fredmac222@yahoo.com)

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