

Mysteries, Clouds, and Wonder

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Hidden in the leaves, hidden in the forests, hidden within the magnificently infatuating wonder that is the country of Costa Rica, one finds a cloud. Clouds here are mysterious entities all by themselves; just as easily as one can observe them from a distance can someone be suspiciously assimilated into the sky. When within a cloud I should warn, one should exercise caution – the nature of the situation may forever enchant your mind with the perception of eternal mystery. We find that the more we learn about nature the less we really do know about her indeed. In essence a field of study like field biology may seem like its driven objective is the acquisition of ultimate and complete knowledge, but as I have experienced first-hand from my internship in Monteverde, the real objective of field biology is to intimately desire to investigate what is within a particular cloud, adventure there within, and never come back with a definite answer.

I was fortunate enough to be selected by the Grace Elizabeth Groner Foundation for a two-month internship in Monteverde, Costa Rica as a tropical habitat restoration research assistant. During my stay I experienced many such things usually left to the dutiful and fantastic power that is human imagination; here in Monteverde even my Spanish experienced its fair share of change and wonder in the form of new slang! I interned at the Monteverde Institute under the tutelage of recognized reforestation expert Debra Hamilton, a brilliant friend and teacher of limitless energy. My duty was to aid Debra and the Monteverde Institute in collecting tree datum from various different plots around the area. To do this I would wake up bright and early, arm myself with a machete, a 5-meter long metal pole, and a measuring tape strapped to my necklace to measure diameter at breast height, and went off into the green depths of the the Curi Cancha Wildlife Refuge. There was always the fear of encountering a red coral snake, or a giant orb-weaver spider, or anything that could be hiding in the tall grass as I slashed my way through really, but nothing was more gratifying than getting past this fear, getting through thickets taller than myself, and finding an adorable half-a-meter-tall *Ocotea* sapling with a tag on it begging to be measured after months of desolation. Using the information collected, I then presented a research project that focused on a particular question formulated while working within the clouds that had enraptured my mind in mystery. The particular question that I decided to focus on came to me very early in the internship – I could not help but clasp curiosity between my fingers as I heard Debra describe the tree as a species new to science. What stood before me was a two-year old specimen of *Myrcianthes* “black fruit”, a canopy tree species belonging to the Myrtaceae family of which very little is actually known of. Immediately I felt an irresistible urge to be the first one to study this tree extensively, and so I focused my efforts in working with the institute to discover everything that we could discover about the species with the time we had.

The fruits of experience were quick to mature and generous in their flavor – a formal description, an illustrated phenology, and a graphical explanation of the effects of fertilizer and maintenance on sapling growth composed the core of my presentation. In researching and working in Monteverde for two months I experienced the passion of reforestation as I wish I

experienced everything else in life: soaked in fresh tropical rainwater armed only with a resilient machete for battling the treacherous brushes that dare make life all the more arduous and exhilarating. The adventure was all the more breathtaking thanks to the friends that came on this internship with me, as well as the new friendships that germinated and blossomed up there. Working with a species doused so heavily in the stench of mystery was an engaging fantasy all by itself, but add up the fulfilling pleasure of actually being able to live in Costa Rica, the chance to interact with the community and the tropical wildlife, and all the random blissful adventures that come with being surrounded by such a vibrant community (never thought I would one day dance salsa on stage with a local music group for instance), and you’ve got within your grasp a sweet concoction derived principally from genial reverie. In Monteverde it is unnecessary for you to lose yourself in inner thought to find yourself with your head deep in the clouds.

From interning at Monteverde I learned that allowing yourself to be immersed in that which is seemingly infinitely dense and dangerous, such as a cloud, may just be that very same element that can infinitely reach into the depths of your curiosity and bring you to the most comfortable state possible: the state of muse, the state of awe. Allow your head to remain up in the clouds for as long as you remain a person - find an internship and travel! Costa Rica while wondrous is but one of the wondrous places this world has to offer! In traveling, researching, and living in other places lies the ability to hone your skills, shape your path, and grow in a manner that is unique to you. In chasing these dreams and gathering these experiences is the ability to find the wonders of the world. In immersing yourself deep within the clouds is the ability to find something that you were not looking for, and yet is of much greater value than anything else you could have imagined.

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