

# Gilpin County News

BLACK HAWK, CO

AND PEAK TO PEAK MOUNTAIN COMMUNITIES

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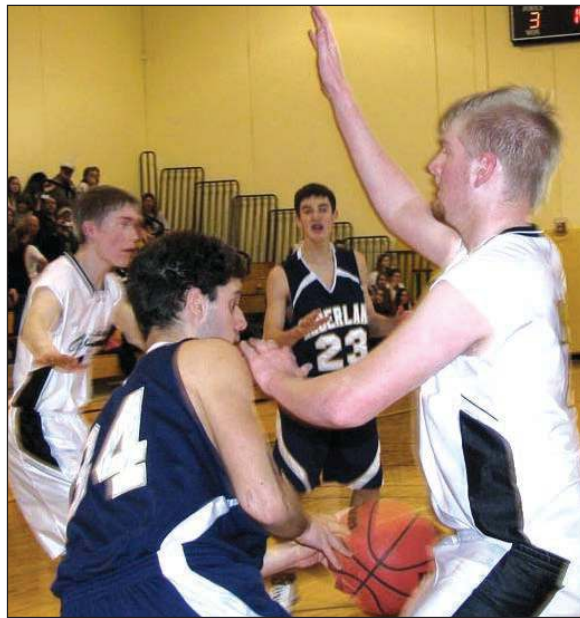
DAVE GIBSON

**This Costa Rican** white-faced monkey bears its teeth at rain forest intruders. Travel along with our wandering photographer as he takes you around the world to warmer places. **p16**



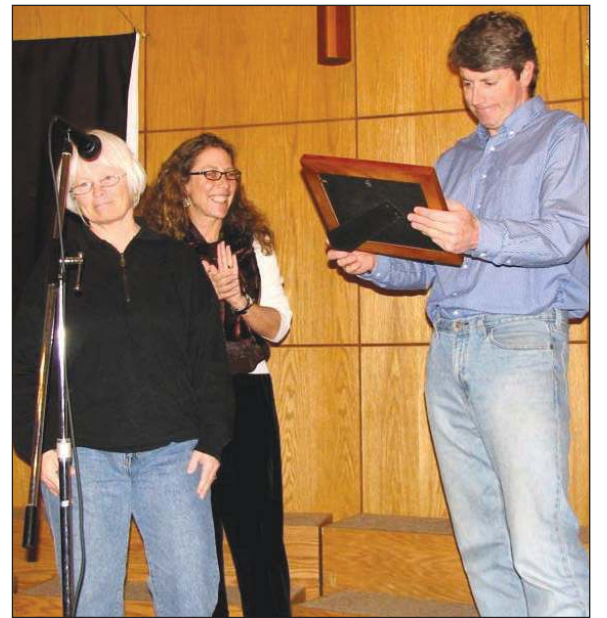
LYNN VOLKENS

**Gilpin Spelling bee** champions go 30 rounds. **p7**



BARBARA LAWLOR

**Basketball** season winding down for both schools. **p9**



BARBARA LAWLOR

**Nederland Community Champs** awards. **p8**

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**Central City** adopts tough noise controls. **p6**

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## COUNTY

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## EDUCATION

**Longer school year** for Gilpin? **p4**



# La Pura Vida

## Costa Rica's spectacular beauty

by Dave Gibson

"Pura Vida" means pure life in Spanish and Costa Rica offers some of that in one form or another to all its many visitors. The "Rich Coast" is a varied land of rainforests, mountains, farmlands, waterfalls, and beaches. At Monte Verde Cloud Forrest Reserve or the ever-erupting Arenal Volcano, daytime highs during the winter might only reach into the sixties. While visiting Manuel Antonio National Park, on the Pacific coast during February, temperatures stubbornly hovered at around ninety.

Two lane roads twist from San Jose 160 kilometers to my ultimate destination of Quepos and Manuel Antonio. One lane bridges can at times back up traffic as each respective direction of vehicles waits its turn to cross. Halfway, I reach Parque Nacional Carara. Under the bridge lie 25 American crocodiles basking on the banks of the Rio Grande de Tarcoles. This can be a good place to see scarlet macaws flying by at sunrise or sunset. It is noon and with nary a macaw in sight, I move on.

Parque Nacional Manuel Antonio is the smallest national park in the country but what it lacks in size it makes up for with its monkey populations. Black howler, white-faced, and squirrel monkeys navigate their way through the rainforest in their daily quest for food. Two-toed and three-toed sloth reside in the trees above foraging coatis in search of the day's sustenance. The coatimundi or coati (a member of the raccoon family with a pointed snout and curved tail), and monos (monkeys) are not beyond snatching bathers' picnic baskets and routinely check

each unoccupied towel and pile of belongings. After hiking all the trails and only hearing the whooping of black howlers, I return to the main beach and find a group of people with necks craned upward. A band of white-faced monkeys (locally known as capachinos) fill the branches above. Leaping from the end of a branch, a capachino grabs hold of the next tree's limb and shimmies down its trunk. Reaching between a forked branch, he scoops out a drink of water. I brace against a tree to steady my camera when I feel it shake. When I look down and to the side, a white-faced monkey is sitting on a stump inches from my knee! A few of the monkeys lounge with their appendages drooping downward from a comfortable limb. Onlookers peer to the sky seemingly unaware of any danger. Jeff Corwin of TV's "The Jeff Corwin Experience" may revel in this kind of interaction with wild animals but I do not! While taking my pictures, I make sure to never stand directly under the monkeys. They are in their natural environment and natural behaviors such as those of bodily functions will occur. In the midst of the dry season, several picture-takers and apparent non-satellite TV watchers receive an unexpected shower!

Crashing noises through the dried leaves on the forest floor usually indicates the presence of an iguana, Jesus Christ lizard, or anole. A pair of bats by the path shade themselves under a broad leaf. Further along the trail, I notice a slight movement in the undergrowth. A brilliantly iridescent black and green dart frog has revealed itself. One of a wide range of auratus, this particular species was introduced from Hawaii. These and other "poison dart" frogs' secretions have been used by Amerindian tribes in Central and South America to treat the tips of their arrows. So



DAVE GIBSON

The secretions of the "dart frog" are used by natives to poison their arrows.

deadly, injected prey can succumb to its toxins within minutes. Later that afternoon I would see a pair of sugar cicadas, cleverly disguised, motionlessly clinging onto a tree's similarly colored bark. Everyone's favorite, gregarious squirrel monkeys are hand fed bananas that evening at the restaurant.

After three days of wildlife photography and mono pictures firmly in the can, I turn my attention to the ocean. The palm-lined white-sand beaches stretch to the horizon continuously being reshaped by the tide. A humpback whale surfaces just offshore. A sandpiper scampers ahead of the lapping waves occasionally pecking at the sand. One morning the sea temporarily lends her bounty to our fishing party in the way of golden-eyed jacks, crocodile needlefish, and mackerel. The surfers at Playa Escondida catch waves backlit by a deep orange sunset. One dreadlocked surfer sees my lens on him and does his best Richard Nixon impersonation, flashing me the double peace sign as he goes down. It turns out he owns a nascent rafting company and his streetwise dog kills and eats iguanas. He would be my guide on the Rio Canas the next day.

We pass African palm plantations and teak farms on our way to the river. Weathered sheds cure the stacks of valuable teakwood. At low water this run on the Rio Canas or Cane River is considered class II and III and more technical than I'm accustomed to. I am the only customer today and will have two guides - one to lead the way in a kayak and a trailer to save me. I am lowered down a cliff by rope and carabineer inside my ducky (inflatable kayak) into the river. A steep winding chute of aqua water surges into the pool in which I sit. I'm starting to think that I've gotten myself in over my head. After practicing re-boarding my overturned ducky, we embark. Snaking through the boulder-strewn current, sometimes brushing rocks and at other times digging your

paddle into graveled riverbottom is known as "creeking." I make it to our first and only pullout, pleased with having survived. A few celebratory butterfly strokes below a twenty foot high cascade

and we're off again. I realize now that the river is at such a low stage that it presents no danger of drowning. Always a mistake to underestimate the river, I relax and paddle less aggressively and quickly find myself swimming. The water is refreshing. With my feet downstream the river soon becomes shallow and I stand up. I would get hung up a couple of more times on boulders but rather enjoyed the view. I tell my guide later that I was tired of ruining his paddle on the rocks but he didn't buy my story.

Following a lunch of water, cantaloupe, and a semi-cold cerveza, the boats are being loaded and I have one last opportunity for a swim. The cicadas buzz incessantly as I stand on a rock contemplating my leap. Nothing fancy this time - a simple jump with scissored legs and outstretched arms with which even my feet lightly tap a smoothed out ledge. I skip some stones and immerse myself in the surrounding rainforest and river's coolness. This must surely be part of the "Pura Vida."



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A resourceful coati on the prowl for picnic baskets.



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A meeting of Costa Rican flora and fauna as a butterfly sips nectar.

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