

Pages for All Ages:

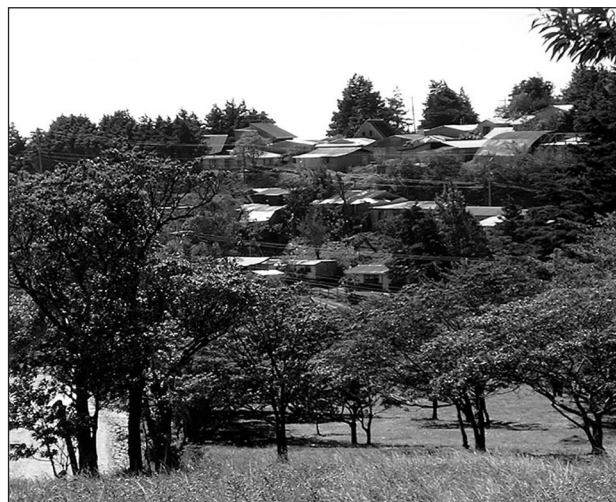
Monteverde Friends

Some words and phrases to know before you read

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|---------------------------|-------------|--------------------|----------------|
| • Costa Rica | • law | • dairy farmers | • rain forests |
| • World War II | • arrested | • steep | • eco-tourism |
| • Selective Service | • wartime | • nature preserve | • environment |
| • military,
militarism | • peacetime | • tents and shacks | • example |

Shortly after World War II, the United States government made a new law called “The Selective Service Act of 1948.” This law said that all young men in the country had to give their names and addresses to the military. Before this law, the United States only made people join the military during wartime. The new law made people get ready for war during peacetime.

Many Quakers believed that this “peacetime army” was wrong. Many Quakers said “no” to the new law. Some got arrested for saying “no” and went to prison. Four of them were young Quakers from Alabama – Marvin Rockwell, Howard Rockwell, Jr., Leonard Rockwell, and Wilford Guindon. They spent four months in prison because they said “no” to the “peacetime army.”



When these four got out of prison, they talked with others in their Quaker meeting. They talked for a long time about what to do. Then half of the Quakers in Fairhope Friends Meeting decided to leave the United States. They decided to move to a country that was more peaceful. They talked about moving to Canada, but that was too cold. They talked about Australia and New Zealand, but those were too far away from Alabama. Finally, they talked about Costa Rica, which was a country that decided to *not* have an army. The weather there sounded nice, too.

A few of the Quakers went to visit Costa Rica to learn more about it. Some of them were dairy farmers, and they could see that Costa Rica was a good place for raising cows. They could see that the people of Costa Rica were healthy and happy and friendly.



Because they learned such good things about Costa Rica, seven Quaker families from Fairhope Meeting decided that Costa Rica would be their new home. This was a hard decision. They would have to leave their homes and families and friends behind. But they did it. They sold their houses and sent their things to Costa Rica. Then they got in a line of jeeps and trucks, and they drove the long way from Alabama to Costa Rica. The youngest member of the group was two, and the oldest Friend was eighty.

They arrived in the city of San Jose, Costa Rica, in February 1951. Then they started looking for a place to build their new Quaker town. They knew they wanted to live in the mountains, where the insects and diseases were not so bad. It took them six months to find the right place. Then they bought some land on a mountain called "Cerro Plano," which means "Flat Hill." They could see it would be a good place for dairy farming. The air was cool, and everything was green and growing well.

They moved to the top of Cerro Plano and started building their town. They named the town "Monteverde," which means "Green Mountain."

The problem with Monteverde was you could not drive there. The road up the mountain was so steep that you could only get up it on a horse or an ox. For a while, the Quakers talked about flying into Monteverde in airplanes, but the mountaintop was too windy for that. It took the Quakers three months to carry all their things up the mountain.

At the very beginning of Monteverde, the Quakers said that a third of their land would always be a nature preserve. They put their meetinghouse and

their family farms on the rest of the land. At first they all lived in tents and shacks. Then they worked together to build real houses and barns. They built machines to make the first electricity in Costa Rica. They started a school and a library.

In the early days of Monteverde, most of the Quakers made their money from dairy farming. Because it took so long to travel down the mountain from Monteverde to other towns, the Quakers couldn't sell fresh milk in other places. The milk would go bad before they could sell it. So they turned their milk into cheese and took the cheese down the mountain to sell.

From the start, Monteverde had lots of visitors from the United States. In the 1960s, people all over the world started to care about saving rain forests. The Monteverde Nature Preserve became a popular rain forest to visit. "Eco-tourism" also became popular all over the world. That is a type of vacation where people learn about the environment. Eco-tourism is now the main way that people in Costa Rica make money.

Monteverde Friends Meeting is still active. It holds meeting for worship every week, and all the messages shared in worship are shared both in English and in Spanish. The meeting is still a living example of people who follow their leadings away from militarism. ❀

This story is based on "Quakers in Costa Rica," a report written by Denny Fernald in August 2016. To read the original report, go to: westernfriend.org/media/quakers-costa-rica.

World map by Addicted04; photo of Monteverde village by WikiPedro; photo of Costa Rican cattle by Ruestz; photo of Monteverde logo by Denny Fernald.

