

## La Trocha del Boyero

by *Atenas Today* staff reporter

Heading east on the main road toward San Jose, about 400 meters from the Coope you will see an old road that turns off on the right. This is *La Trocha del Boyero*, the “path of the ox cart driver”, and years ago it was the way to go between the center of Atenas and Rio Grande. Today this road will lead you to a secluded and charming restaurant, called simply “La Trocha.”

The restaurant has been created in what was the garden of the house of its owner, Lleana Rodriguez Ramos. She and her husband, Frank Valerio Quesada, operate the restaurant with the help of the daughter Maria, 18, and their son Frank Jr., 21. The property was originally owned by Lleana’s grandfather, who sold eggs and cheese to people who passed by on the road.

Lleana and Frank were born and raised in Atenas, but until recently they were living with their children on the Caribbean Coast near Limon. They were both working in a restaurant there when, as often happens, a random event changed the course of their lives. The woman who was the chef at the restaurant suddenly had to return to Nicaragua to care for her mother, and the restaurant was without a cook. The owners looked to Lleana, but she emphatically declined. Frank was the only other choice, and even though he knew little about cooking, he took over in order to keep the restaurant going.

And thus a natural talent was discovered. Frank’s cooking soon became famous in the area. He developed his own special version of rice and beans that included coconut, and I can attest to the subtle, delicious flavor of this concoction. Frank worked for 9 years as the chef in this restaurant, and stayed even after Lleana had moved back to Atenas to give their children access to better schools. However with the decline of the fruit business in the Limon area the restaurant was not doing well, and about a year ago Frank returned to Atenas.

Lleana and Frank’s original idea was to build a small rancho and sell take out food. It was due to the urging of neighbors who were familiar with Frank’s cooking that they decided to create a full service restaurant. Last October they acquired some beautiful old wood from a 100 year old house and began the construction of an open air pavilion with space to seat about 50 people. By Christmas the restaurant was ready for business.

La Trocha is open six days a week from 11am to 10pm (closed Mondays). There is a full bar, as well as a variety of inexpensive Costa Rican dishes. In addition to the rice and beans with coconut, the specialties include “filet la trocha” (fish with a shrimp sauce), pollo con coco (chicken with a coconut sauce), and lomito (one of the best steaks I have had in Costa Rica). The service is excellent and super friendly. Your waiter will likely be our friend Ramon, who used to work at Alida’s.

Finding the La Trocha road can be a little difficult in the dark. If you are heading west into Atenas there is a white sign on your right that points to the road on your left. However, heading east out of Atenas there is no sign. About 300 meters from the Coope you will see a bus stop on your right, and the road is on your right about 100 meters past the bus stop. The restaurant has plenty of secure parking. If you have a big group and want to make a reservation, the phone number is 446-0533 (be prepared to speak Spanish).

In order to encourage the English-speaking community to patronize their relatively new business, Lleana and Frank will give you a free glass of wine or a desert from now through the end of August if you mention this article in Atenas Today.

*Special thanks to Melanie Lesueur, who served as my translator during the interview for this article.*