

NORTHERN LOTUS

The Birken Forest Monastery Newsletter

AUTUMN
2006

- ◆ *Bhante G in Seattle*
- ◆ *2007 Retreats*
- ◆ *Ontario News*

A Visit with Venerable Gunaratana

As the three month monastic Rains approached, in early July Ajahn Sona, Bhikkhu Pavaro, Sister Mon, Anagarika Mike, and Amin Kabani drove to Seattle for a visit with Ven. Gunaratana Nayaka Thera. "Bhante G," as he is widely known, was in the Pacific Northwest doing what has occupied him for nearly 60 years: traveling at the invitation of those interested in the practice and study of Dhamma.

In addition to being the founding abbot of Bhavana Society, the first Theravada forest monastery in North America (established in 1988), Bhante G is the author of several widely-read books on Buddhist practice. He is also Ajahn Sona's preceptor, so this trip provided a rare chance for Ajahn to offer respects to his first monastic teacher, and for the two to catch up on a meaningful acquaintance spanning nearly twenty years.

The main event of our visit was a day of sightseeing kindly arranged by John Roberts and Ladawan Kongkarat. Our first destination was Mt. St. Helens. Bhante G peppered John, driver of the "monks' car," with numerous questions: how much volcanic ash was sent into the atmosphere? how many people perished? how many animals? and so on. He commented several times on a great lesson in this awesome event: the stunning evidence that "even mountains" *change!* Following the midday meal, we were driven several hours north to the beautiful Mt. Ranier. This stop offered Bhante G an opportunity for a vigorous hike. An enthusiastic daily walker, he managed this in his sandals - undaunted even by the



Bhante G with friends, in front of Mt. Ranier in Washington. Front to back: Maechee Mon, Ladawan Kongkarat, Ven. Gunaratna, Ajahn Sona, Ven. Pavaro, Amin Kabani, with Anagarika Mike to the left.

steep patches of summer snow. (And it was a little short for his liking.) It's fair to say that all of us were amazed by Bhante G's energy - indeed, it was often difficult to remember that he is nearing his 79th birthday!

Reflecting on our enjoyable visit, a pair of impressions of Bhante G come to mind: calm and probing intelligence; sure-footed. In all, it offered us all a wonderful opportunity to be in the presence of an elder monk who has contributed (and *continues* to contribute) so much to the understanding and development of Buddhism in the West.

Long may his path continue!

Dhamma Talks on Website: Coming Soon

Thanks to the generous initiative of Dustin Harriman, hundreds of hours of Dhamma talks by Bhante G as well as dozens of other monastics are now available for Birken visitors to copy onto CDs and DVDs in our library.

In addition, Dustin is presently working hard to make the entire collection available for download directly from Birken's website. We expect they should be on-line early in 2007.

Birken Retreat Schedule - 2007

TO REQUEST A BOOKING IN ONE OF THESE RETREATS, OR TO COME FOR AN INDIVIDUAL RETREAT PERIOD,
PLEASE E-MAIL BIRKEN'S OFFICE STEWARD. SEE CONTACT INFO ON PAGE 4.

Ten-Day	March 2—11	Extended practice periods Previous retreat experience required
"Absolute Beginners"	April 13—15	Relaxed schedule Evening meal available
Five-Day	May 2—6	Longer meditation periods Regular Instruction
Ten-Day	June 1—10	Extended practice periods Previous retreat experience required
Ten-Day	July 20—29	Extended practice periods Previous retreat experience required
"Absolute Beginners"	August 10—12	Relaxed schedule Evening meal available
Ten-Day	August 24—September 2	Extended practice periods Previous retreat experience required
Introductory Weekend	September 14—16	Regular instruction Shorter sitting periods
Ten-Day	Sept 28—October 7	Extended practice periods Previous retreat experience required
"Absolute Beginners"	October 19—21	Relaxed schedule Evening meal available
Introductory Weekend	November 23—25	Regular instruction Shorter sitting periods

Recent Projects

It has been a few months of "refinements" at Birken, beginning with the basement. In the spring, Birken monastics completed boxing in the overhead plumbing in the basement. This was useful preparation for the three hired carpenters who installed tongue-&-groove pine boards to the remaining portion of ceiling. We then revitalized the floor over the walking area, giving the whole area fresh coats of paint and polyurethane.

Later this fall, the carpenters will return to add walls at two ends of the sala. This will provide a room for monastics on one side, and offer a hallway to the rooms at the north end of the main

floor. With these additions, the sala will be effectively sound-proofed, making it available for peaceful meditation at all times.

During the early weeks of the fall, considerable energy was devoted to landscaping the northern face of the monastery. It involved the labours of the monastics and stewards and, at various times, a dozen willing guests. This project was cheerfully guided throughout by Catherine Kennedy, who arrived on site in late August, with her van overflowing with plants and soil, and equipped with detailed drawings envisioning the finished product. Spurred on by her expert ideas (and aided by a mini-

excavator and large Bobcat) holes have been dug, trees and shrubs planted, and magnificent boulders artfully arranged.

Installed in late June, throughout the summer 16 solar panels have proved their worth, reducing the use of our diesel generator by about 60 percent. Although the autumn sunlight now generates less power, on most days we see a few extra kilowatts stored in our battery bank.



Following the sun: Ajahn manually turning the two solar arrays.

In line with the solar project, we have recently installed a small monitor to establish the viability of further supplementing our electrical generation with a windmill. Eventually, we also hope to replace

our gasoline-burning vehicles with “hybrid” ones. In general, Birken hopes to become as independent as possible of fossil fuels in the coming years.

The above photo also offers some indication of the devastation to the pine trees in our area (and throughout much of the province) brought on by the mountain pine beetle. Trying to make the best of a bad situation, Birken has enlisted professional tree-fallers to level several hundred “dead red” trees adjoining our property. In a case of “the cloud with the silver lining,” the felled trees will provide several years of fuel for our wood boiler, with the open sky to the west offering more light (and solar power) late in the day.

Our final piece of practical news is to announce that a new tractor will soon be arriving at Birken! Earlier in the fall, a generous donor ordered a new John Deere for the monastery. The ma-



Renewed basement: pine ceiling and newly-painted walking paths.

chine will be a 4WD, large and powerful enough to keep the 7 km length of our roadway clear all winter. Visitors over the past five years from late November to early April will have experienced our intensely “variable” driving conditions. Although good tires will always be necessary, we do expect that the worst of our weather will be less troublesome to winter retreatants, not to mention busy Birken stewards - George and Linda - running errands for another week.



Irma West enjoying time with Ajahn Sona. Irma and Ralph, Ajahn's parents, try to visit Birken every year.

Edmonton Retreats

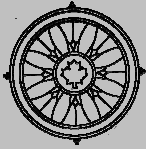
BIRKEN MONASTICS WILL BE LEADING THE FOLLOWING RETREATS IN EDMONTON FOR THE LIGHT OF THE DHAMMA SOCIETY. THEY WILL TAKE PLACE AT THE PROVIDENCE RENEWAL CENTER, 3005 - 119 St., Edmonton.

For registration details, contact: Sheila Lennox | 11002 University Ave. Edmonton AB T6G 1Y3

Phone: (h) 780.433.1386 (w) 780. 427.1568

E-Mail: LightoftheDhamma@gmail.com

Five-Day	April 25—29, 2007	Bhikkhu Pavaro
Ten-Day	June 30—July 8, 2007	Ajahn Sona



Birken Forest Monastery

E-MAIL:

meditate@birken.ca

(the best way to reach us)

WEBSITE:

www.birken.ca

PHONE:

250.434.2555

(leave message)

DONATIONS

Birken Monastery is supported solely through the ancient practice of DANA, generosity.

Donations can be made to:

Birken Forest Monastery Society
PO Box 5
Knutsford, BC
CANADA V0E 2A0

◆ Canadian tax receipts are available for all donations.

A New Monastery in Ontario

For many years, groups from Ottawa to Toronto have hoped to encourage Ajahn Viradhammo to establish a monastery in the area. When he formally agreed, last winter, this pent-up aspiration quickly became focused on fund-raising and the property search.

Months of committed endeavour have resulted in the successful purchase of Canada's third Theravada forest monastery: *Tisarana Buddhist Monastery*. Possession of the property took place in late October. It is situated near Perth, about an hour south of Ottawa. A large old home and several outbuildings are included on its 100 acres.

In January, Ajahn Kusalo will return from Australia to take up residence. The inspiring dedi-

cation of many people is going into setting up the monastery. (Among those involved are two known well to many of our readers: Marion Foot and Stephen Roehrig.)

Meanwhile, Ajahn Viradhammo - a seasoned abbot if there ever was one! - is trying to spend time on site each week to offer his experience during these early days.

We will leave others to calculate the chances that two of the world's Theravada forest monasteries should be near "Perth." (The other, led by Ajahn Brahmavamso, is in Australia.) As to the merit of this enterprise: *INCALCULABLE*.

Further information: www.tisarana.ca

Contact: office@tisarana.ca

Adventures in Monastic Living

During the Rains, Kalyanamitta House, a residence supporting women's practice, made a brief but inspiring beginning in Abbotsford. Assisted by Cathy Meadowcroft, Sister Mon spent the period from early July to early October in quiet practice in a modest suburban house.

The conditions proved (in one of Sister Mon's favourite expressions) "good enough" for the retreat. However, as the Rains was concluding a flooded basement signalled an end to the experiment.

Ajahn Sona has had a longstanding commitment

to support women's monastic practice. To this end, the monastery covered the rental costs and Ajahn offered regular encouragement.

The two retreatants welcomed many visitors during their period of practice. Sister Mon has been very grateful for the ongoing interest and support of friends on the Lower Mainland, and beyond. Indeed, this interest bodes well for her commitment to establish sustainable conditions for solitary practice.

While a "Kalyanamitta 2" is certainly possible in the future, for the moment Sister Mon is content to be back at Birken for the winter retreat.

Paths of Gold

(for the builders of the roads)

I walk the golden gravel roads and paths of Birken, now,
with a new sense of your generous presence
blessing us, moment to moment, and day by day.

I walk with gratitude, every foot-fall a blessing sent:

May the gift return to you manyfold:

May these paths of gold - your kusala dana -

 dwell in your memory, warming your heart,

 bringing you joy, and peace.

May your Path be smooth,

 and built on a firm foundation.

May your Way be easy,

 cleared and paved by others who went before.

May you walk with grace and confidence.

May you grow in faith and wisdom.

May you reach the final goal.

*with kataññuta ca mudita ca
- a fellow traveller*



*Summer wildflowers
along the pathway.*