

NORTHERN LOTUS

The Birken Forest Monastery Newsletter

Spring 2004
Volume 16

Features:

Bhikkhu
Ordination

Mexican
Vihara

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Abbot's Island

This is the third spring from which we've emerged at Smith Lake. Each emergence has been accompanied by exclamations of how much has been accomplished since the previous spring. "Remember that first spring? A sea of mud, no siding on the buildings, Tyvek flapping in the wind, out of firewood, the road a quagmire, dreading building inspection visits!" Well this spring was really quite civil, no one was reported missing between the main building and the office. Instead, neat pathways and stepping stones, dry parking lots, and neat brown buildings smiling in the breezy sunshine.

It all begins to remind me of the spiritual practice. As the Buddha said "This is a gradual path to a sudden realization." Our third winter retreat was atmospherically more refined, stable and productive as our new monks and long-term lay retreatants are showing their seasoning. It has been interesting to watch a whole gang of people gain experiences and spiritual maturity, and to see how they affect each other and newcomers in a positive way. I particularly appreciate this developing atmosphere in terms of my own practice. It seems the "terrible two's" have passed.



Nearly home: a recently donated marble Buddha from Vietnam, awaits its final installation in the Sala

Lay people in North America will begin to see a budding crop of Dhamma teachers appear to guide growing groups of lay-meditators. Venerables Nanda, Pavaro, and Sister Mon will be venturing forth as emissaries of the peaceful way, to a world that could use a little spiritual balm instead of bombs.

This is also a landscaping year. Time to turn to our surroundings outside the building and to impose the marks of order, beauty, and serenity. Our landscaper Radina has many plans for us; stay tuned for progress reports.

All for now, from
Abbot's Island

Talks & Travels



Please visit [Birken Retreat and Events](#) page for upto date list of talks & travel.

*Batik in the
meditation Sala*

Important: please notify us of changes

Every year, a significant number of reserved rooms go unused when people change their plans and do not tell us.

The monastery is a precious resource. Demand for Birken's accommodation is steadily growing. We would like to avoid having to deny meditators an opportunity to come because a reserved space has gone unfilled.

Monastics and stewards manage the reservation system with limited resources and time.

Before finalizing your registration, please be clear about your commitment to come.

If your plans change, it is your responsibility to inform us.

"No shows" may become ineligible to reserve a room in the future, at our discretion.



Retreats – 2004

Please visit online [Birken Retreat and Events](#) page for up to date list of retreats.

Personal Retreats at Birken

From April 1st to December 30th each year, Birken welcomes meditators to come for personal periods of retreat. First-time visitors may book up to 10 days.

In addition to quiet time for meditation and reflection, the monastery is situated in a fine

natural landscape for walks.

There are daily opportunities to speak with the abbot individually, as well as during afternoon tea-time.

To register for a stay at the monastery, simply contact our office (see information on Page 6).

Mexican News – Vimutti Vihara

Morning dawns for the meditators with sounds of crowing roosters and braying donkeys. A heavy mist fills the valley below and continues to blanket the majestic *encino* (holm oak) trees on the property – a new day at Birken's recently established "branch" monastery near Tehuacán, in south-central Mexico.

Since early December, Ven. Thitapuñño has been residing at the newly-named Vimutti Vihara, "abode of freedom." The monastery is on the border of Puebla and Veracruz states. Situated at an elevation of 7900 feet, it should remain temperate during even the hot months. For much of December Tahn Puñño was joined by Ajahn Sona, who was thrilled with the densely treed new property. Ven. Pavaro was there in February. Among other things, the visit marked his first experience of going on *pindapat*, almsround, led by Tahn Puñño.

Enthusiasm for Vimutti has been evident from the outset. Abel Vera and several other



Main building, Vimutti Vihara, Mexico

dedicated Mexican practitioners have fulfilled steward duties, and been joined by Canadians Mike Mahony, Dave Gardiner and Philip Jurgens, as the monastery's first retreatants.

In spite of some inevitable logistical changes Ven. Thitapuñño still hopes to begin his ambitious Pacific Crest Trail walk sometime in April (reported in our Fall newsletter). Before long, Vimutti Vihara should be able to receive retreatants on an ongoing basis. *See Page 6 for contact information.*

Bhikkhu Ordination

The time-honoured Bhikkhu ordination of Ven. Nanda and Ven. Pavaro was conducted at Birken on November 29th, 2003. In addition to being Birken Monastery's first Upasampada ceremony, Ajahn Pasanno, their preceptor, remarked upon its historical nature – the first ordination of Canadians in Canada, with a Canadian “quorum,” including a Canadian *upajjhaya* (preceptor) and *acariya* (teacher)!

Ten monks were in attendance to witness and participate in the solemn, joyful event. Ajahns Viradhammo and Punnadhammo flew in from Ottawa and Thunder Bay, respectively.

Three monks accompanied Ajahn Pasanno from Abhayagiri Monastery, in California: Vens. Sudanto, Jotipalo, and Pasukho. Ven. Kitthisaddho, from the Lao temple in Surrey, was also able to come.

Finally, Ven. Sopako Bodhi (formerly Ajahn Sobin), an elderly Thai monk, traveled from Thailand especially for the occasion. A longtime meditation teacher of Vens. Nanda and Pavaro, in December 2000 they accompanied Ajahn Sobin to Bodh Gaya to witness his re-ordination as a monk.

Birken's abbot, Ajahn Sona is the new Bhikkhus' *acariya*. He and Ven. Thitapuñño spent many hours during the days leading up to the ceremony helping the ordinands with their chanting as well as with the “choreography” of this ancient rite of passage.



Among the 80-or-so lay well-wishers were several of the new venerables' family members. They included Tahn Nanda's mother, Dorothy Roehrig, and Tahn Pavaro's 90 year old father, Ben Hove. In addition, we were honoured to welcome Rhoda Perry, Ajahn Pasanno's mother. Having missed her son's ordination in Thailand over 30 years ago she decided to take advantage of this opportunity to witness one closer at hand!

In all, the last few months of 2003 were transitional at Birken. Its inaugural Bhikkhu ordination was

Community News

This February David Gardiner was welcomed into Birken's monastic community as an Anagarika.

In addition to two new Bhikkhus, December's ordination left another telling mark on Birken communal life: Ven. Sudanto. Over the past few months we have been recipient of his enthusiasm and expertise on several fronts (e.g., does a more computer-literate monk exist?).

When Tahn Sudanto returns to California in early April Birken will be receiving another Abhayagiri resident, Ven. Dhammadaso, in his place.

Over the next few months Ajahn Sona, Vens. Nanda Pavaro and Maechee Mon will be making several teaching trips to Vancouver, Seattle, Kamloops, the Okanagan and Calgary.

Mike Mahony, who has been acting as a steward over the winter retreat, will soon be traveling to Arrow River Forest Hermitage to practise with Ajahn Punnadhammo. George continues his "multi-tasking" for everyone's benefit, while for the last few months Amin has been enjoying the role of Birken "tea master."



Bhikkhu Pavaro and Bhikkhu Nanda, newly ordained

Financial Report

Spring time not only signals the ending of the winter retreat but also the beginning of a new year. The bare spots on the Monastery calendar quickly fill with scribbles indicating retreats, talks, travel plans and VIP visits. Construction and maintenance considerations are also on our minds at this time of year as we prioritize projects that fall within our budget.

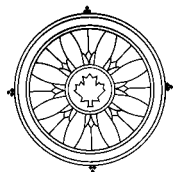
The Monastery assumed a \$150,000 loan in 2002 to repay a private loan and provide funds for necessary building. An additional \$25,000 payment on the loan was made possible by a generous donation received last summer. The present balance is \$114,320, and should the current rate of donations continue, our intention is to discharge the loan entirely by late 2006.

The Monastery could originally qualify only for a commercial loan, fixed at 7.5% interest. As such, our current monthly payment is \$1381, which represents a significant portion of our operating expenses. Not surprisingly, Ajahn Sona is reluctant to allocate more than is absolutely

necessary of our supporters' *dana* to bank interest charges. One method to reduce our monthly expenses: The monastery would be willing to offer a better rate of interest than currently given by the banks to anyone wishing to extend a loan to the Monastery.

Please note that one important result of our present need to concentrate on loan repayment is that over the short term we would prefer that donations not be "targeted" for future building projects. Many thanks for your understanding.

Finally, the conclusion of the annual "tax season" makes this a good place to remind members that all donations to the monastery receive tax receipts which are eligible for tax-refunds. On this subject, it is worth "plugging" the use of auto-debiting one's account on a monthly basis. Supporters of other monasteries have been finding this very practical and, needless to say, it offers the monastery itself a more reliable sense of the incoming donations.



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Annual General Meeting

Will be held at Birken Forest Monastery, on **Saturday, October 9, 2004**

Monetary Donations

Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery is supported solely through the ancient tradition of Dana, or generous giving.

If you would like to support the Monastery and resident community you can mail **CHEQUES** or **MONEY ORDERS** payable to: The Treasurer, Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery Society, PO Box 5, Knutsford, B.C., CANADA V0E 2A0.

AUTO DEBITS and **DIRECT DEPOSITS** are also welcome. These can be made to: Interior Savings Credit Union, #600 – 1210 Summit Drive, Kamloops BC V2C 6M1 (Transit #05870; Institution #809) The Account No. is 10-7024342

NEW: The Monastery is presently arranging for the means to make **ON-LINE** donations. Please contact the Birken office if you would like more information.

Current Needs

Non-monetary donations are welcome. Please feel free to consult the monastics or Stewards for suggestions on needed items. Our webpage contains a current list of Suggested Dana Items.

Offerings of food are also acceptable. Our kitchen Stewards can provide a list of current needs at your request.

Sewing Project

We are considering using an insulated set of blinds on our large sala windows to limit summer light

and keep in winter warmth. Would anyone be interested in helping to sew a group of blinds?

Laptop Computer

The monastery's computing requirements continue to evolve. Birken presently needs to replace its "elderly" (and power hungry) second computer. Because we generate energy at 8 times the cost of the power grid, we have decided to replace it with a portable laptop model.

For the record: A "great Title hunt" dominated teatimes during our Winter retreat's final days, with our new title narrowly edging out *Forest Views* and *Birken Pond Reflections*. Several of the suggestions (*The Birkenstocker?*) were less likely.