

NORTHERN LOTUS

THE BIRKEN FOREST MONASTERY NEWSLETTER

WINTER
2004

'BULLETIN'

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Recent Events

In early July Birken was honoured to receive a visit by several senior monks from Thailand. They were led by Ajahn Liam, who was chosen in the early 1980s to succeed Ajahn Chah as abbot of Wat Pah Pong. One of his rare trips abroad, Ajahn Liam had come to inaugurate the exquisite new Buddha rupa at Abhayagiri Monastery in California. Among the monks accompanying Ajahn Liam were his secretary, Ajahn Uthien and several monks from Abhayagiri, as well as Ajahn Jundee, abbot of Wat Pah Ampawan, and Ajahn Nyanadhammo, the abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat (the "International Forest Monastery," where so many Western monks have received training).

On their first night here, Ajahn Liam led a blessing ceremony for Birken's magnificent new marble Buddha rupa, donated by Linh Pham. Only a day before the ajahns' arrival, the statue had been installed in our sala on a stately cedar altar designed by Kim Pham and hand built with consummate skill by Bruce Armstrong (see *Transitions*).

Birken residents and assembled guests were given far-ranging Dhamma talks by both Ajahn Liam and Ajahn Nyanadhammo during their brief time here.

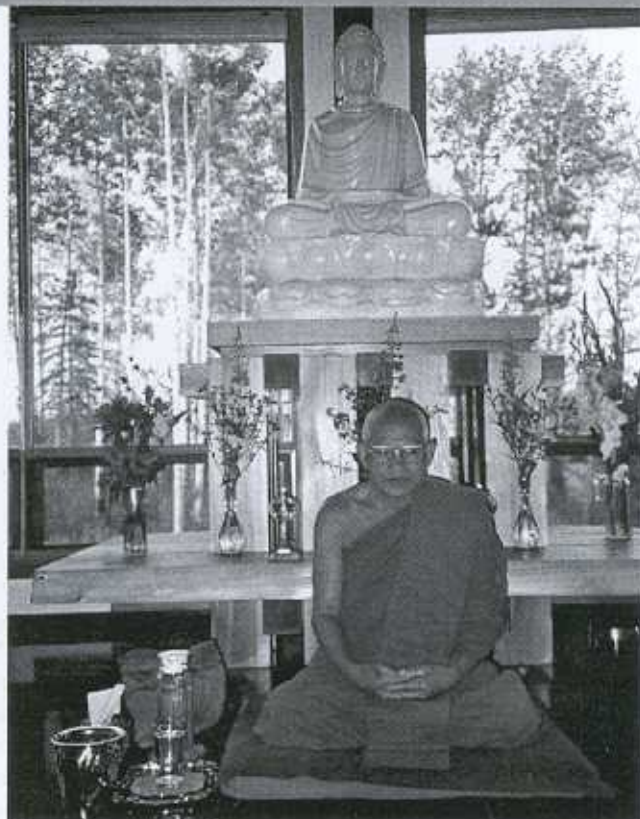
The inspiring visit of these senior disciples of

Projects

Assisted by many volunteers over the spring and summer, Birken continues to be developed on several fronts. *The short list:*

Some heavy post-pounding work permitted the installation of a kilometre of wire fencing to keep the local range cattle off our property. Result? No more scenes of monks chasing cows and ... no more flies! *Special thanks:* Aaron Sheppard.

With the use of a 50 ft. crane lift, netting was attached under the eaves around the building to prevent the annual swallow population from nesting (etc).



Ajahn Liam, abbot of Wat Pah Pong, at Birken's new altar.

Ajahn Chah came about 25 years after his trip to Vancouver, an event still vivid in the hearts of many Buddhists in this part of the world. As for our marble Buddha, it will remain at Birken as generous evidence that practice of this great Path continues.

A cozy, wood lined kuti, donated by Stan Eamon, was completed in record time in early summer.

Extensive concrete work, a Shinto-inspired gateway, shrubs, gravel work, and artful boulder placements have begun to transform our front entrance. *Honourable mentions* to Radina Jevdevic and Kim Pham for their expert ideas

Finally, nearly a km of trenched lines now provide propane to 6 kutis, eliminating the ongoing labour of moving, transporting, refilling and returning the heavy tanks. *With appreciation* to recent steward Bruno Casolari, on "trencher detail"!

2005 Scheduled Retreats at Birken Forest Monastery

New phone number:
(250) 483-4326

Requests to attend these retreats continues to grow. Registrants are asked to be clear about their commitment to come. Please notify us promptly of any changes.

Note that **INDIVIDUAL RETREATS** can also be booked between late March and late December.

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|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| April 22 — 24 | Weekend Retreat | Friday 4:30 — Sunday noon |
| May 4 — 8 | 5-Day Retreat | Wednesday 4:30 — Sunday noon |
| May 20 — 22 | "Absolute Beginners' Retreat" | <i>Easy does it! Short sittings. Opportunities to talk. Evening meal available.</i> |
| June 24 — July 3 | 10-Day Retreat | For meditators who have experienced several shorter retreats. |
| Sept 23 — Oct 2 | 10-Day Retreat | For meditators who have experienced several shorter retreats. |
| Oct 21 — 23 | Weekend Retreat | Friday 4:30 — Sunday noon |

Transitions

- A busy few months have prevented us from producing a longer newsletter. The limitations of space afforded by this abbreviated "bulletin" are most evident in what follows.

Bruce Armstrong, a wonderful friend and supporter of Birken Monastery, died in Japan in late November. Bruce's warm, wise character was expressed as much in his timely offerings to the monastery—a superbly built kuti, our new serving table, the magnificent altar—as in the integrity he brought to his spiritual life. He was a joy to work alongside of!

Ajahn Sona, along with Bhikkhu Nanda, Bhikkhu Pavaro and Maechee Mon, participated in the funeral for Bruce in Nanaimo. Shortly afterwards his wife Buhnmanee, their sons Brendan and James, and Bruce's sister, Vicki, brought his ashes to Birken. It was Bruce's deep wish that his remains be permanently interred at what he came to regard his spiritual home.

After 4 fruitful years at Birken **Maechee Mon** is now making her way to Thailand to continue her training. Her long-planned return will enable her to visit with family she has not seen for many years. Consistent with Mon's compassionate nature, she spent much of her final time in Canada offering thoughtful, practical assistance to the Armstrong family after Bruce's death. Her devotion to the Dhamma, buoyant energy, and intelligence have contributed a great deal to the life here and will be missed. Maechee Mon's immediate plans back in Thailand? ... "Uncertain."

In early December **Bhikkhu Nanda** made the decision to return to lay life (now Stephen Roehrig). Any visitor to Birken will have witnessed the tremendous dedication that marked his activities here, whether in his monastic training or the diverse tasks he so skillfully undertook. Regarding the latter, it is hard to look anywhere in or around the monastery without finding evidence of his considerate nature. Stephen brings into his new life an abundance of merit and new insights, along with our sincere wishes for his happiness.

Guests to Birken over the last few months will know that since May we have enjoyed the gentle presence of **Bhikkhu Dhammadaso** from Abhayagiri Monastery. As it happens, Ven D's scheduled return following the end of the Rains was thwarted by a snag with his US visa. Efforts continue to negotiate this complex web of formal contingencies, even while we continue to outfit him a full complement of warmer clothing!

Early in the Winter Retreat the Birken community will welcome 2 new Anagarikas into its midst. **Kellan Howard** and **Ryan Shick** have been here for several weeks now and Ajahn Sona has agreed to their request for formal admission. In monasteries that follow Ajahn Chah's mode of training, this is the first stage for aspirants entering Buddhist monastic life.

Final note: the **Annual General Meeting** for Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery Society will take place here on October 8, 2005.