



BIRKEN

Forest Buddhist Monastery



In the Theravada Forest Tradition of Ajahn Chah

Birken Forest Monastery is situated in a remote area about 40 kilometres south of Kamloops, British Columbia. Also known by the ancient Pali name *Sitavana*, “cool forest,” Birken is one of the few Theravada forest monasteries in North America. As a monastic residence and retreat centre, it fulfills an important role in the transmission of Buddhism in the West.

Birken also offers accommodation and meditation guidance to lay people seeking a peaceful environment for practice. Retreatants may reserve space individually, or come during any of the group retreats scheduled each year – our website offers dates and other information.

Theravada Buddhism in the West

For 25 centuries, Buddhism has flourished in Asia. Only in recent times has the liberating doctrine and way of life proclaimed by Gotama Buddha spread to Western cultures. Several of the main Buddhist schools have arrived in recent decades. The Theravada tradition, which is reckoned to be the surviving school dating from the time of the historical Buddha, has only recently established roots in Canada.

Within Theravada Buddhism, the Forest Tradition is distinguished by monasteries located in natural settings, well removed from the hustle and bustle of cities. The communal lifestyle of forest monks and nuns is simple, quiet, and geared towards meditation practice rather than the social and ceremonial functions that often prevail in urban Buddhist temples.

Birken's Setting

The monastery is set in the midst of 80 wooded acres at an elevation of about 4,000 feet. The large main building at Birken provides suitable accommodation for guests, and features a magnificent meditation hall overlooking the nearby marshland and surrounding forest. Outdoor cabins (*kutis*) are used as living quarters by the monastics and resident community.

The Community

A Theravada monastery is a place where the monastic community (*Sangha*) lives. Members of the Sangha live in accord with the code of practice and conduct called the *Vinaya*. This superstructure was set up by the Buddha to secure the most efficient transmission of the teachings. The Vinaya stipulates that monastics should be alms mendicants, and live lives of celibacy and simplicity. Buddhist monks and nuns are not to prepare food or handle money, thereby encouraging reliance on the laity.

Mutual support between monastics and laypeople is fostered through the practice of generosity (*dana*). The laity customarily provide items of daily sustenance for the monastics – accommodation, food, medicine, and clothing. In turn, Buddhist monastics offer the laity spiritual guidance, and an example of how the holy life, conducive to the end of suffering (*nibbana*), may be lived.

When addressing monks, one may use the term “Venerable” or “Bhante.” Nuns may be addressed as “Ayya” or “Sister.” For monks and nuns ordained for 10 years or more, it is common – in the Thai tradition – to use the term “Ajahn” (teacher).



*Ajahn Sona
is the founding
Abbot and
spiritual
leader of
Birken Forest
Monastery*

With a background in classical music, Ajahn Sona left the worldly life to become a hermit for several years. He ordained as a Theravada monk in 1989 at Bhavana Society Forest Monastery (with Ven. Gunaratana as preceptor) and trained further in Thailand, in monasteries in the lineage of Ajahn Chah. Ajahn Sona's teachings combine tried-and-tested Buddhist wisdom with contemporary sensibility.

Staying at Birken



Advance reservations are required to stay at the monastery. They are best made through the Birken website. (See *Contact*, below)

First time visitors may come for a stay of up to five days, with a two night minimum. Most accommodation is in private rooms in the guest house. Men and women's quarters are separate. Accommodation in a cabin may be available for return guests.

Dress should be modest and suitable for meditation. Please bring toiletries (unscented), a towel, flashlight, alarm clock, and suitable outdoor footwear.

The virtue of generosity was much praised by the Buddha. In keeping with Buddhist principles, accommodation and all instruction are offered without charge. All the resources needed to maintain the monastery (food, fuel, insurance, office supplies, etc.) come from freely given donations.

Donations by cheque should be made out to:

Birken Forest Monastery

and are eligible for a Canadian tax receipt for each donation of \$25 or more. Donations of food and other items are welcome.

The Eight Precepts

Meditative development requires a peaceful and harmonious environment. Residents and guests at Birken Forest Monastery are asked to observe the following precepts:

1. **Harmlessness:** not intentionally taking the life of any living being
2. **Trustworthiness:** not taking anything that is not given
3. **Celibacy:** refraining from sexual activity
4. **Right Speech:** avoiding false, divisive, harsh, or frivolous speech
5. **Sobriety:** not taking intoxicants
6. **Renunciation:** not eating after midday
7. **Restraint:** not seeking entertainment, playing radios and music; dressing modestly
8. **Alertness:** refraining from overindulgence in sleep

Daily Schedule

Guests are generally asked to observe "golden silence" during times not listed below. *This schedule may vary through the year.*

5:15 am	Wake-up bell
5:30 - 6:20	Group meditation
7:00 - 8:20	Breakfast & light chores
8:30 - 9:30	Meditation period
11:00 - 12:00*	Main meal & cleanup
2:30 - 3:30	Meditation period
5:00 - 6:00	Tea Time & Dhamma discussion with Ajahn Sona
7:00 - 7:50	Group meditation & chanting

*11:30 - 12:30 during Daylight Savings time

Coming to Birken

Bus

Regular *Greyhound* service to Kamloops.

Flights

In Canada: *Air Canada*, *WestJet*, *Newleaf* and *Central Mountain Air* fly into the Kamloops airport.
From USA: *Horizon Air* offers Seattle - Kamloops flights.

Driving

- From KAMLOOPS: Driving west on the TransCanada, take HWY 5A south towards Merritt (EXIT 368). Drive for about 25 km. Look for 'Roche Lake Resort' sign. Turn left at Roche Lake Rd. Next ...
... ROCHE LAKE RD: Follow this gravel road for 7 km, then turn right at Smith Lake Forestry Rd. Follow the 'Birken' signs for another 7 km.
- From VANCOUVER / MERRITT: Take HWY 1 to Hope, then HWY 5 (the Coquihalla) to Merritt. At Merritt, turn onto HWY 5A north towards Kamloops (EXIT 290). Drive about 70 km. Look for 'Roche Lake Resort' sign. Turn right on Roche Lake Rd. As above ...

Contact

WEBSITE:	birken.ca (Guest info, retreat requests)
YOUTUBE:	youtube.com/ajahnsone
E-MAIL:	meditate@birken.ca
PHONE:	778.785.6059 (message only)
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