

Meditation on the River

A river canoe retreat on the
Green River in Utah

RETREAT TEACHERS – Victoria (Tory) Capron
Susie Harrington

October 1 – 9, 2010

THE RETREAT

Meditating in the Desert: This trip provides a unique opportunity to explore the power of a silent meditation retreat while immersed in the beauty and wildness of Southern Utah. We will participate in an age-old tradition of going into the wilderness as a support for spiritual practice and inquiry. Immersed in nature, we will use meditation practices to increase our receptivity to interconnectedness, preciousness and beauty that surrounds us. Through our enhanced openness and quiet, we have the opportunity to explore deeply the truth of our own nature. We will be in a supportive community as we explore this inner and outer journey.

Spiritual Awakening: This retreat will offer a variety of sitting, paddling and walking meditation practices, and an opportunity for deeper exploration through group process work and individual meditation instruction. This is a Buddhist meditation retreat with each leader bringing their own experiences to the practice. This trip will be held in Noble Silence and require a commitment by participants to this practice. Keeping noble silence for eight days in the wilderness is in itself a powerful practice.

On this retreat, the leaders will emphasize nature as our teacher, providing us with a special opportunity to open to the Dharma. The peace that comes from spending time in the desert will provide a natural support for cultivating tranquility and joy in our hearts and clarity in our meditation. Sitting in the beauty of the canyon country gives us ready access to rapture, that quality of delighted interest and awe, and one of the seven factors of enlightenment. In many retreats, we're asked not to look around. In this retreat, we'll be encouraged to look around a lot and to delight in what we see.

PRECEPTS

We will undertake to follow the five traditional lay precepts of non-harming during our time together, forming a reliable basis for mutual trust in our little community:

1. To refrain from killing and from other actions that harm oneself or others.
2. To refrain from stealing, from taking anything that is not freely given.
3. To refrain from sexual activity during the retreat.
4. To refrain from lying and from harsh, abusive or damaging speech.
5. To refrain from consuming alcohol, illegal drugs, or other intoxicants.

DANA AND RETREAT COST

The Buddha asked that the teaching of the dharma be offered freely, without charge, since it is of infinite value, and beyond any price that could be put on it. The tradition of 'Dana', or mutual giving, has supported Buddhist cultures for 2500 years. In Asia, the monks and nuns offer the teaching, and the lay people support the monastery and fill the monks' begging bowls each morning as they walk through the village on alms rounds. It is a beautiful exchange, in which the hearts of both giver and receiver are opened in joy and gratitude, and love flows between them.

In accordance with that tradition, Tory and Susie are, in the spirit of generosity, offering their teachings, time and service. The \$725- \$625 fee just covers the retreat costs: food, group gear, canoe rental, shuttle to and from the river, and other incidental expenses. After the retreat, there is the opportunity for participants to practice generosity in offering financial support to Tory and Susie in appreciation. By offering financial support to Tory and Susie, we will support their continuing to teach the dharma. There is a suggested donation of \$50-100 per day while we're on the river. Please know that your participation allows these retreats to continue, and without ongoing support, the teachers are not able to offer extraordinary retreats of this sort. For more information and guidelines, please see the article from Robert Beatty.

TRIP OUTLINE

The trip will take place in the spectacular canyon country of southeast Utah. We will be shuttled with our canoes and equipment to put on the Green River at Mineral Bottom and float through beautiful Stillwater Canyon to the Confluence with the Colorado River. From here we will have a ride on a jet boat, with all our gear, back up the Colorado River to Moab.

BEGINNING AND ENDING

The trip will begin and end in Moab. Participants will need to arrive in Moab in order to meet at 4pm on September 30th for our group orientation. We will leave early the next morning for the river put-in. We will finish on Saturday Oct 9th at 5pm. You will be responsible for your own dinner and lodging on Thursday evening and Saturday evening after the trip.

There are many hotels, camping areas, bed and breakfasts, etc. in Moab. You may wish to reserve a place for before or after the trip. Camping is usually available at that time of year, though tight on the weekend, in nearby parks and public lands. To assist with sharing travel and lodging, as we near the trip date, we will send you a request for travel information

TRAVEL BY AIR

Currently, there is air service to Moab from Denver, and connections beyond. The service is sometimes spotty. Grand Junction is the next closest airport and it may be possible to connect those arriving by plane with those driving through that town. Alternatively, there is a once a day shuttle from the SLC airport on the Bighorn Shuttle (888-655-RIDE). Other options include flying to SLC and renting a car (4 hrs drive each way); flying to Grand Junction, Colorado and renting a car from there (2 hrs). (Unfortunately, there is no public transportation from Grand Junction to Moab).

THE RIVER

We will be a party of 8 or 9 canoes. We will spend 4 -6 hours on the river each day (though this is dependant on water level, wind, etc.)

Days will begin with meditation, then breakfast, break camp, load boats, and river time. River time is paddling meditation, Wind meditation. Sun meditation. Tandem canoes allow us to paddle with ease on the slow current of the river. We will paddle as a loose group, keeping in sight and while enjoying our own silence, keeping the larger sense of our group.

Lunch is usually on the river. Afternoons we will have time for walking and sitting meditation, and dharma teachings or check-in circle. We will camp each night on a sand bar along the river. In camp, Tory and Susie will lead meditation sits, talking circles, and dharma talks.

Sits will mostly be 30 minutes, though some may be longer. There is flexibility regarding attendance at teaching and meditation sessions; however, attendance at sessions that address safety and plans of the group or which involve group cohesion are generally required.

There will be some opportunities to walk up side canyons while in camp or at lunch. Retreatants will each have a daily work duty to help the flow of the trip, and to provide service to all. Most duties will be cooking or camp related.

Near the end of trip, there will be an opportunity to spend one day and one or two nights camping and practicing in solo retreat. No additional gear is required for this, but some have found a large daypack or small overnight pack useful for walking further. This is a favored aspect of the retreat – for some the greatest pleasure is being far away and alone, and for others camping alone but within the container and proximity of others is preferred, this is entirely up to each individual.

WEATHER

October on the river will most likely be comfortable temperatures with an afternoon peak of hot temperatures. Plan for days in the 80's and 90's and cool nights (in the 50's). Rain, though not common, occasionally comes in torrents. During a storm, the daytime temperature may drop into the 50's, with gusty winds. Though usually not an issue there may be bugs - you may be grateful for a headnet.

EXPERIENCE AND EQUIPMENT

Participants need not have previous river experience; however, previous camping experience is helpful. You do need to be healthy and have sufficient fitness and agility to be at ease in a remote wilderness setting.

You will need to bring your own camping equipment. Try to keep your total equipment weight to 25 pounds, including a tent with a rainfly (or a waterproof bivouac sac) and a lightweight sleeping bag. A dry bag (to put gear in and keep it dry on the river) will be provided with canoe rental. Lifejackets will be available with canoe rental unless you prefer to bring your own.

A clothing and equipment checklist will be sent to all retreatants.

It is helpful to bring whatever will allow you to sit in meditation (an inflatable zafu,, a stack of stuff sacks, etc.) A Thermarester or Crazy Creek chair for eating, talking circles etc. (or for sitting practice) is highly recommended.

MEALS

Our breakfast, lunch and dinner menu is vegetarian and simple. Please tell us in advance of any dietary restrictions. Tea will be provided but if you have personal preferences, we ask that you bring your own hot and cold drink mixes (tea, coffee, Gatorade, etc.). Dried fruit, fresh fruit and nuts will be provided, but if you would like special snacks, you may bring them. Food, stoves and cooking equipment are provided; you should bring your own cup, bowl, and, eating utensils. Cooking, cleanup and other camp duties are shared. Please eat breakfast before we meet on the launch morning. We will provide lunch on the last day.

WATER

We will be bringing all our water, in large containers, with us on the river. Please have two one quart bottles for your daily water. All water used in camp for cooking will be boiled or filtered.

SAFETY

Safety needs to be a primary concern for each of us, since what happens to anyone affects the whole group. Being conscious with every step is the best protection from injuries. Most river trip accidents occur on shore. River edges are slippery, and the transition between canoe and shore needs particular care. While the river will be low and relatively mild, it is always possible to slip and fall in the river.

RETREAT STAFF

Victoria (Tory) Capron, M.A. is a Buddhist teacher and psychotherapist. She has been studying Buddhism for 26 years, with equal amounts of Zen, Vipassana and Tibetan in that order. She has a Masters degree in Buddhist Studies and Counseling and has been teaching and working with both groups and individuals for 10 years. She has led groups in the outdoors for 20 years for organizations such as Outward Bound and the Women's Wilderness Institute, and been a backcountry ranger for the National Park Service. She is also an Emergency Medical Technician.

Susie Harrington has been meditating since 1989, and been engaged in Insight meditation practice since 1995. She has completed Spirit Rock Meditation Center's Dedicated Practitioners Program and Community Dharma Leader program. Her primary teachers are Guy Armstrong, Jack Kornfield, and Tsoknyi Rinpoche. She is also influenced by Adyashanti and her collaborative work with Tory Capron. She is a graduate of the Professional Hakomi Therapy training – a mindfulness and bodybased psychotherapy modality. She lives and teaches in Moab. She has been an outdoor professional for over 30 years, including years as a river guide, mountaineering guide, and backcountry ranger for the National Park Service.

TO APPLY

REGISTRATION

The total fee for the trip is \$725–\$625. The sliding fee reflects a minimum cost where the donations of contributors to Sky Mind allow for a lower fee, while the higher cost represents full cost of the trip and some support to Sky Mind. Any fee above the minimum is tax deductible.

A \$200 deposit and an application form will reserve you a place up to August 1 – sixty days before the trip. (You may also choose to pay the full fee, and the cancellation policy remains the same.) If you apply after August 1, please remit full payment. **We must have received full payment by August 1 in order to guarantee you a space in one of the canoes we have reserved. At thirty days all unpaid-for canoe and jet boat spaces will be released.**

Reservations are confirmed on a first-come, first-served basis. Please fill out a separate form for each person. If the retreat is full, you'll be placed on a wait list. If that happens, don't be disheartened, as there will probably be cancellations. Only the \$200 deposit needs to be paid by those on the wait list.

PAYMENT

Full payment is due August 1st. If it is not received on time, the reservation may be canceled and the deposit forfeited. If you cancel after making your reservation, your \$200 deposit will be forfeited. If you cancel prior to August 1st, the \$200 deposit will be forfeited (and any amount over \$200 returned to you). If you cancel after August 1st the \$200 deposit will be forfeited and the remainder returned to you provided we can fill your spot. If we cannot fill your spot, we will only be able to refund a small portion of your fee, dependent on meeting our group expenses.

You will receive full refund (including the \$200 deposit) if you cancel from the wait list, or are still on the wait list when the retreat starts.

Canoes will be rented for the trip. If you would like to bring your own canoe, and you can provide full outfitting for two people, we will be able to refund you \$120 of the trip cost (\$60 per person using the canoe). We will need to know ahead of time and after August 1st we cannot guarantee full refund.

PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION

You'll be sent a confirmation notice by email, and you will receive a list of suggested clothing and equipment. Further information, such as a map and detailed directions on when and where to meet and how to get there, will be sent with your confirmation.

TRIP INSURANCE

You may wish to purchase trip insurance, available at any travel agency. It will protect your investment in non-refundable airline tickets if you have to cancel or if the retreat is canceled due to circumstances beyond our control. Most policies also cover medical evacuation costs in case of injury - a good deal for backcountry travelers, since a backcountry medevac almost always involves the use of an expensive helicopter, which you would otherwise be responsible for.

OBLIGATIONS OF RETREAT APPLICANTS

This is a non-profit trip sponsored by Sky Mind Retreats. We will all be responsible for our own safety and the safety of the group and for doing the work that is part of a wilderness trip. For this reason, please consider your physical condition. You will need to be able to take care of yourself, as well as be helpful to the group on a day to day basis. Because of the remoteness, in consideration of the other retreatants, we ask that you be in good health. Please evaluate your circumstances, and call or email if you are unsure of the appropriateness of this trip for you. You are expected to carefully review all information furnished, understanding that this is a meditation retreat rather than a recreational outing, requiring a commitment to noble silence and practice. Also, we ask that you understand as thoroughly as possible the physical and mental demands of the trip and the risks to be encountered and you properly equip yourself for the backcountry. Part of our practice will be to mindfully commit to non-harming, so that our impact on the environment is minimal and the rights and privacy of other retreatants are respected.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Please feel free to contact Quilley Powers at skymindretreats.org