



SKY MIND RETREATS

MEDITATION BACKPACKING RETREAT ON THE RAINBOW TRAIL, NAVAJO NATION, UTAH

Retreat Teacher: Susie Harrington

Trail Guide: Bowe Ellis Cook: Jennifer Knochel

April 7th – 16th (9 days)

Capacity: 17

Sliding Scale: \$525 – \$415

To retreat in nature allows us to

Awaken our sensitivity to the preciousness of the natural world.

Open our appreciation to nature as teacher.

Deepen our understanding of our inter-connectedness with the earth and all life.

Encourage an embracing wakefulness to all moments in our life.

THE RETREAT

Again and again the Buddha recommended practice out of doors. As our society separates us further from our true, wild nature, this recommendation could not be more appropriate. This is an opportunity to “return home,” to deepen our practice, and to travel through an extraordinary wilderness.

We are following the same route as past successful Rainbow Trail retreats, which touched surprising depths of practice and Sangha companionship. This will be a nine (9) day meditation retreat in the Buddhist tradition.

It will be a special opportunity to practice the art of walking meditation, as we will be backpacking 4-6 miles most days through the beautiful slickrock desert. Most of our time will be spent in noble silence, allowing the attention to turn inward, though there will also be times for daily check-ins, Dharma discussion, and interviews with the teacher. Days when we break our formal practice for a few hours to hike in silence will mix with layover days, when we will be able to follow a more conventional sitting-and-walking schedule in incomparable settings.

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 the Rainbow country of the Navajo Nation. We will participate in an age-old tradition of going into the wilderness as a support for spiritual practice and inquiry. Immersed in nature, and in the quiet of our meditation practice, we will open ourselves to the interconnectedness, preciousness, and beauty of our true nature. Sitting in the beauty of 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.

DEEPENING OUR PRACTICE: This trip will be held in Noble Silence and will require a commitment by participants to this practice. While holding this silence we will have many opportunities for different forms of meditation, whether as a group backpacking from camp to camp, in more formal sitting practice, or in personal solitude. During the retreat there will be a one-day, two-night solo, during which we may use our own practice and form a closer bond with nature. In this retreat the Unknown that surrounds us will become palpably close. Assuredly it will allow opportunities for surprise, delight, and challenge. In our retreat, just as in everyday life, we can learn to accept and flow with outcomes that are out of our control. This is one facet of nature's great teaching.

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 & RETREAT COST

The Buddha asked that the teaching of the Dharma be offered freely, without charge, since it is of infinite value, beyond any price that could be put on it. Thus, 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, Susie, Bowe and Jennifer are, in the spirit of generosity, offering their teachings, time and service. The fee just covers the retreat costs: a Navajo Nation permit, food, payment to a Navajo family to take us from Page to the trailhead, boat fare from Rainbow Bridge to Wahweap Marina and other travel and incidental expenses. After the retreat, there is the opportunity for participants to practice generosity in offering financial support to the leaders in appreciation. The dana you contribute provides essential support for the leaders to continue their Dharma service. It will be warmly and gratefully received. There is no "suggested donation", and no donation is required to participate.

RAINBOW COUNTRY

Thirty million years ago, pressure from a body of molten magma far underground bent the overlying formations upward around the edges of what is today the forested dome of Navajo Mountain (10,388 feet). The monolithic sandstone to the north cracked as it bent. During the last five million years, as the entire region was uplifted, running water flowed from one crack to another, widening and deepening them into a crazy-quilt maze of precipitous sandstone mesas, arches, domes in varying hues of color and sinuous canyons with clear streams, waterfalls and pools. Rainbow Bridge, the world's largest natural span, in a deep canyon now partly submerged by Lake Powell, wasn't discovered by non-native people until 1909.

Eleven thousand years ago small bands of wandering hunters pursued mammoths and giant ground sloths near Navajo Mountain. Cliff dwellings and sacred rock art of the ancestral Puebloans, whom the Navajo call Anasazi, still grace the canyon walls in remote locations. The Anasazi moved away by 1300 A.D. It was Paiute country until the 1860's, when a few Navajo families moved into the canyons, hiding out from Kit Carson and the U.S. Army. Today it is part of the vast Navajo Indian Reservation, larger than some eastern states. Some Paiute families still live nearby.

THE BACKPACK

On the beautiful trail I am, with it I wander.

- Navajo Chant

DESCRIPTION

We skirt the north flank of the mountain from east to west on an old trail through some of the wildest slickrock terrain in the Southwest. As we circle to the west, crossing from one canyon to another, we experience expansive vistas, warm, glorious days, cold starry nights, the fresh spring green of cottonwoods in the canyons, redbud in bloom, sunset light on smooth red canyon walls, and perhaps a tempestuous spring storm. Except for the small area of Rainbow Bridge National Monument, our hike is on Indian lands, sacred to the Navajo people.

TRIP DIFFICULTY (Light to Moderate)

We backpack from 2-6 miles a day, (with up to 800' elevation gain) with three layover days. We start hiking at 5120 feet and finish at Lake Powell, now over a mile below Rainbow Bridge, at about elevation 3560 feet. The Rainbow Trail, though not maintained and rough in places, is easy to follow. It cuts across canyons and the ridges that separate them. We will have a resupply on the 5th day, which cuts down the amount of food we need to carry at the start, however **you must be fit enough to carry a 35 to 45 pound load over rough terrain.** Backpacking places different demands on muscles and joints than running, cycling or other sports. **Exercising by carrying weight while walking is the best preparation.** (Backpacking is the best way to get in shape to backpack!) If you haven't backpacked for several years, it may be harder than you expect.)

BEGINNING AND ENDING

We meet in Page, Arizona at 7:00 p.m. Wednesday evening, April 7th for a planning discussion. Early Thursday morning, after parking our cars at nearby Wahweap Marina on Lake Powell, we will drive 90 miles to Rainbow City, near Navajo Mountain. We arrive at the Cha Canyon trailhead, where our hike begins.

On Friday afternoon, April 16th, we hike down to Lake Powell, about a mile below Rainbow Bridge, and board a sightseeing boat for a 3-1/2 hour ride back to Wahweap Marina. We should reach our cars there by about 5:30 p.m.

GETTING THERE

Las Vegas or Phoenix, about a 5 hour drive from Page, are usually the least expensive airline destinations. Flights are also possible from Phoenix to Page using Great Lakes Airlines. Wherever you are coming from, there may be an opportunity to carpool. We ask that you allow us to add your contact to the group. A contact list of retreatants will be sent regularly before the trip to coordinate travel. Making travel arrangements is your responsibility. If you know your plans before then, please let us know, or if you have a specific ride need, we can tell you if someone is coming from your area. A map, a description of local motel accommodations and campgrounds, and a detailed explanation of where and when to meet will be sent to all retreatants.

MEALS

Our menu is vegetarian, lightweight and simple. Please tell us in advance of any dietary restrictions. **To accommodate your personal preference, we ask that you bring your own hot and cold drink mixes (coffee, tea, Gatorade, etc.) and trail snacks.** Stoves and cooking equipment are provided; all you need to bring are your own cup, bowl and spoon. Cooking and cleanup duties are to be shared on a voluntary schedule. The first meal is lunch on Thursday April 8th. The last meal is lunch on Friday April 16th.

EQUIPMENT

Pain-free feet and a well-fitted backpack are the keys to an enjoyable trip. Bring sturdy hiking boots, **already broken in**, to protect your feet on the rough trail. Temperatures will probably be moderate to cool: cool nights and warm days; but due to the unpredictable nature of spring weather on the plateau, be prepared for wind and rain, and the possibility of snow. Shorts may be worn for hiking, but beware of sunburned legs. Hat and dark glasses are strongly recommended. Glare from sand, rock and sky can cause extreme eye discomfort.

You will need to bring your own camping equipment, including a tent with a rainfly (or a waterproof bivouac sac) and a sleeping bag. Try to keep your total equipment weight to 25 pounds. You must carry up to two quarts of water, which adds four pounds, **plus up to ten pounds of trip food and commissary equipment.** (Your pack needs to be large enough to accommodate that. You may bring more, but remember that you will be carrying it.) A clothing and equipment checklist will be sent to all retreatants.

You will need to purify stream water along the trail for drinking water. **Please bring a water treatment system for your personal use:** iodine tablets (Potable Aqua), chlorine dioxide drops (Aquamira), or a filter pump (several brands – extra weight!).

SAFETY AND INSURANCE

Safety needs to be a primary concern for each of us, since what happens to anyone affects the whole group. We will be in terrain where cliffs and steep slopes abound. This is a wonderful opportunity to be mindful of every step – and this is your best protection from injuries. Nevertheless, accidents do happen. While an injury or ailment is unlikely in the backcountry it is important to be aware of its possibility. As a not-for-profit organization, Sky Mind Retreats does not carry its own insurance to cover a retreatant's medical evacuation.

You may wish to purchase evacuation insurance to cover expenses associated with a medevac. This can be a good deal since a backcountry medevac almost always involves the use of an expensive helicopter, which you would otherwise be responsible for. There are several respected providers to choose from, such as the American Alpine Club, World Nomads, or Global Rescue, Inc.

You may also 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.

RETREAT STAFF

Susie Harrington has been practicing meditation since 1989, primarily within the Insight Meditation Buddhist tradition. She has been teaching since 2005 under the direction of her teachers – Guy Armstrong, Jack Kornfield, and Tory Capron. She has also been influenced by her practice with Advaita Vedanta and Dzogen teachers. She lives in Moab, Utah, and teaches classes, weekends and longer retreats in the Four Corners area and California. She has completed Spirit Rock Meditation Center's Dedicated Practitioners Program and Community Dharma Leader program. 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.

Bowe Ellis recently began to offer his skills as guide for meditation retreats. Although this means a fresh start, he brings 13 passionate years of wilderness and guiding experience accrued through backpacking, ski patrol, and mountaineering. This is his third retreat into the Rainbow Bridge country. His love of and dedication to wilderness practice is rooted in both Buddhist Insight and Shamanic traditions. An avid participant in wilderness retreats, Bowe is dedicated to the exploration and molding of this new Western style of practice.

Jennifer Knochel is a student of the dharma. She has been offering her skills as a cook to support wilderness retreats for four years. A passionate cook, she is dedicated to nourishing retreat participants with local organic whole foods. Jennifer recently relocated to the eastern Sierras in Bishop, CA.

TO APPLY

REGISTRATION

A \$100 deposit is required to reserve you a place until March 7th (30 days before the trip). In addition please fill out the **Registration Form**, **Medical Questionnaire**, and **Release Form**. We require these forms to be sent in with your deposit. The forms are available on the website, www.skymindretreats.org. Make the check payable to **Sky Mind Retreats**. Send all registration materials to: **April Retreat, Box 2151, El Prado, NM 87529**.

Reservations are confirmed on a first-come, first-served basis. Please fill out a separate series of forms 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. No payment (other than the required deposit) is necessary for those on the wait list. You will receive full refund if you cancel from the wait list, or are still on the wait list when the retreat starts.

PAYMENT INFORMATION

We are offering a sliding scale retreat cost, from \$525 to \$415. In our attempts to keep the retreat fee low, we have consistently had to subsidize many costs associated with the retreats. If you are able to pay higher on the sliding scale it will help the long term sustainability of Sky Mind Retreats. Please give as much as you can afford, and know that every bit you give is essential.

Full payment is due by March 7th. If it is not received on time, the reservation may be canceled and the deposit forfeited. If you cancel after making your reservation, your \$100 deposit will be forfeited. If you cancel prior to March 7th, the required deposit will be forfeited (and any remainder returned to you). If you cancel after March 7th the \$100 deposit will be forfeited and a portion of remaining payment will be returned. These reimbursement terms are listed on the Registration Form.

This trip is organized and run by a California non-profit organization, with no commercial outfit running the trip or profiting from it.

Scholarships are available from the Golden Bowl Foundation. We would like you to apply if you need support. To apply you will need to download and fill out the Golden Bowl form on the website, www.skymindretreats.org. Please include this with your registration forms and your \$100 deposit. If we cannot meet your needs, the deposit is refundable. Scholarship money is for direct retreat costs; if you would like to offer dana to the teacher and staff, please consider it in your budget.

PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION

A list of suggested **Clothing and Equipment** and additional **Information on Dana** are also included on the website. Please be sure to read all materials to familiarize yourself with all aspects of this trip. Some final information, such as a map and detailed directions on when and where to meet and how to get there, will be sent later.

Please remember, when you send in your deposit be sure to send in ALL the forms. We can only register you when we have this info.

OBLIGATIONS OF RETREAT APPLICANTS

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 Bowe at bowellis@gmail.com or 575-779-2111 with your questions and concerns.

*Today I will walk out, today everything evil will leave me,
I will be as I was before, I will have a cool breeze over my body.
I will have a light body, I will be happy forever,
nothing will hinder me.
I walk with beauty before me. I walk with beauty behind me.
I walk with beauty below me. I walk with beauty above me.
I walk with beauty around me. My words will be beautiful.*

*In beauty all day long may I walk.
Through the returning seasons, may I walk.
On the trail marked with pollen may I walk.
With dew about my feet, may I walk.*

- Excerpt from a Navajo Prayer