



## SKY MIND RETREATS

### MEDITATION BACKPACKING RETREAT IN THE SOUTH SAN JUAN WILDERNESS, COLORADO

August 14<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup>, 2010 (7 days)

Retreat Teacher: Susie Harrington

Trail Guide: Bowe Ellis

Cook: Jennifer Knochel

Capacity: 17

Cost: \$375 - \$290 (sliding scale)

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*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.

This is a seven-day, six-night wilderness meditation retreat, in the Vipassana Buddhist tradition, located in the spectacular rolling mountains of southern Colorado. This is a backpack trip to a base camp where you will only need to carry your own personal gear (about 30 lbs) for the four-mile hikes in and out. Our group food and gear will be shuttled to the camp by horseback. While out in the wild we will be giving ourselves the opportunity to deepen our practice through sits, day hikes, and mindful daily practice. 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.

**MEDITATION IN WILDERNESS:** This trip provides a unique opportunity to explore the power of a silent meditation retreat while immersed in the lush, rugged beauty of the Colorado Rockies. 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 with the mountain beauty 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 day hiking the high country, 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 one's self 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 and in the spirit of generosity, Susie, Bowe and Jennifer are offering their teachings, time and service. The fee just covers the retreat costs: group food purchase and preparation, pack animals, 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 necessary.

## A FOREST UNTOUCHED

The South San Juan Wilderness is the wildest in all of Colorado. Few people visit this vast area of 160,000 acres. In this land you are a visitor to the home of a diverse population of wildlife – elk, bighorn sheep, deer, mountain lion, marmot, trout, and pine. It is so wild that there are still rumors of grizzly bears living here. This is a mountainous region with broad U-shaped valleys cut by ancient glaciers, their flanks now blanketed by dense forest and expansive alpine meadows.

Our new "home" will be a base camp at 10,800 feet in a beautiful alpine valley situated below rolling 12,000 foot peaks. The camp is in an exceptionally beautiful spot of chaparral on a big meadow divided by a crystal clear stream. In our hikes above tree line we will take in vast vistas and scintillating alpine lakes. Back in camp there are flowers dripping with morning dew and dramatic cascades off the valley walls. In the evening a monsoon thunderstorm might crash through with a fit of lightning and hail and then pass, leaving rainbows in the setting sunlight. The place is ever a delight to the senses and resonates in its wildness.

## THE BACKPACK

### TRIP DIFFICULTY (Light Backpacking and Day Hiking)

We will backpack just twice: once into and once out from camp, a four mile hike with 500' of elevation gain from the trailhead. All other hikes will be non-strenuous day hikes where you will only need a light daypack. You will be responsible for carrying your own gear – a tent, sleeping bag, pads, clothing, et cetera. See the Equipment List for a complete list of your responsibilities. On all hikes our pace will be gentle. The terrain for the backpack is not arduous but ankle support and trekking poles are recommended. The greatest challenge is the altitude: the trailhead and camp are both above 10,000 feet and necessitate both acclimatization and ease with our bodies. The evening before the hike we will help condition ourselves to the altitude by car camping at a National Forest campground. If you know you are particularly susceptible to altitude sickness you should also plan to stay the night of Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> in a nearby hotel or campground.

Even though group gear is handled by horseback **you must be fit enough to carry a 30 pound load for several miles.** 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. Also consider the nature of the camping. We will be away from vehicles and buildings and it can rain or storm. If you are inexperienced with wilderness camping be sure to get some practice before the trip.

## BEGINNING AND ENDING

**We meet at a campground in Platoro, Colorado at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday evening, August 14<sup>th</sup>.** Here we will have introductions and dinner and a night to acclimatize to the altitude. After breakfast the following morning we begin our hike from the trailhead, which is nearby. Platoro is a tiny summer community on the east side of the San Juan Mountains. The closest towns with lodging and dining are Antonito, Colorado, and Chama, New Mexico (both about 2 hours away from Platoro). Alamosa, the largest town in the vicinity, is about 2 1/2 hours away. The roads from Antonito, Chama, and Alamosa are easy drives for 2WD vehicles, entirely on pavement or gravel. A more adventurous drive is possible direct from Pagosa Springs.

On Saturday afternoon, August 21<sup>st</sup>, we emerge from our retreat to our cars. After a brief meeting we are all free to head off our own ways. We plan to be back to the cars by 4:00pm.

## GETTING THERE

For flights Albuquerque is often the least expensive and most laid-back hub, about a 5-1/2 hour drive from Platoro. Denver, 6 1/2 hours away, is a second option. With an additional leg you can reach Alamosa (3 hours away) using Great Lakes Airlines or United. 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 list of retreatants will be sent out well before the trip to coordinate travel. Making those 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, dining, and a detailed explanation of where and when to meet will be sent to all retreatants.

## MEALS

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are provided as part of the trip cost. 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 dinner on Saturday, August 14<sup>th</sup>. The last meal is lunch on Saturday, August 21<sup>st</sup>.

## 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 cool to warm days. Mornings are usually sunny, giving way to cloudy afternoons. Be prepared for wind and rain, and the possibility of snow. A monsoon thunderstorm is almost certain at least once on this trip, but with a little luck we will time things to be in camp when rain comes. Bugs are usually on the decline by late August, but some mosquitoes will be around. A hat (for sun) and head net (for bugs) are strongly recommended. You may want to hike in shorts but because of rain and bugs some lightweight nylon pants and top/bottom rain shells are essential. There is one stream crossing with ankle-deep water. To keep your boots dry take along a pair of old sneakers. Trekking poles are useful and recommended for the stream as well as day hiking off the trail.

You will need to bring your own camping equipment, including a tent, sleeping bag, and pad(s). Tents with rainflies are best, but nearby trees are available to rig a rain tarp above a tent or bivouac sac. To increase the depth of silent practice we recommend one person per tent. Also you will need to bring a day pack unless you plan to carry your backpack on day trips. Refer to the clothing and equipment checklist. Try to keep your total equipment weight to 25-30 pounds, and make sure your backpack will hold all your gear.

You will need to purify stream water 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!). As part of the group gear we will have tarps as shelter for sitting practice.

## **SAFETY AND INSURANCE**

Safety needs to be a primary concern for each of us, since what happens to anyone affects the whole group. 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 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 Dzochon 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. 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. Bowe lives in Taos, NM.

**Jennifer Knochel** is a student of the dharma. She has been offering her skills as a cook to support wilderness retreats for 4 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**

Before July 15 (30 days before the trip) a \$100 deposit is required to reserve your place. In addition please fill out the **Registration Form**, **Medical Questionnaire**, and **Release Form**. We require **ALL** of these forms to be sent in with your deposit. The forms are available at [www.skymindretreats.org](http://www.skymindretreats.org). Make the check payable to **Sky Mind Retreats**. Send all registration materials to:

**Sky Mind Retreats, 5 Pamela Drive, Petaluma, CA 94954.**

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.

## **PAYMENT INFORMATION**

Full payment of \$375-\$290 (sliding scale) is due by July 15th. 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 July 15th, the required deposit will be forfeited (and any remainder returned to you). If you cancel after July 15th the \$100 deposit will be forfeited and a portion of remaining payment will be returned. These reimbursement terms are listed on the Registration Form.

## **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 the three 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 Quilley Powers at [registrar@skymindretreats.org](mailto:registrar@skymindretreats.org) with your questions and concerns.