

MEDITATION AND BACKPACKING RETREAT GRAND STAIRCASE / ESCALANTE NATIONAL MONUMENT

Retreat Teacher: Susie Harrington

April 12-18, 2020 (7 days)

Cost: \$400-300

*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 interconnectedness 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 will be following the same route as past successful Escalante retreats, which touched surprising depths of practice and Sangha companionship. This will be a seven (7) 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 2-5 miles many 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-in, Dharma discussion, and interview 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 Escalante/Staircase National Monument. 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 the 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. 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 generosity, 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 is, in the spirit of generosity, offering the teachings, time and service. The fee just covers the retreat costs: food, teacher travel, supplies, and incidental expenses. After the retreat, there is the opportunity for participants to practice generosity in offering financial support to the teacher in appreciation. The Dana you contribute provides essential support for the teacher to continue her Dharma service. It will be warmly and gratefully received. There is no "suggested donation," and no donation is required to participate.

LOGISTICS

DESCRIPTION

We will be hiking through the slickrock desert country typical of the many side canyons of the Escalante. We will travel primarily off trail, and on easy to moderate terrain. Each day we will begin with an early meditation, followed by a combination of walking, sitting and free time. There will be some day hikes and some free time. We will be traveling in remote and wild country and safety will be our first priority to each other and for the group as a whole.

TRIP DIFFICULTY (Moderate)

We backpack from 2 – 6 miles a day, (with up to 300' elevation gain) with two layover days. The terrain is not difficult, but it is not manicured trails over flat ground. **You must be fit enough to carry a 30 to 40 pound pack over uneven, rocky, untrailed terrain.**

Getting ready: Backpacking places different demands on muscles and joints than running, cycling or other sports. **Exercising by carrying weight while walking is a good way to prepare. 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. Please be very honest with yourself about your fitness at this moment and how fit you can be by the time of this trip.

BEGINNING AND ENDING

We will meet in Boulder, Utah, at 10:00 a.m. Sunday, April 12th, 2020. We will carpool to the trailhead not far away. You will need to be ready to backpack to our first camp that night. Please bring your own lunch for the first day. We will eat not far from the trailhead.

On Saturday afternoon, April 18th, 2020 we will complete our hike and return to our cars in the afternoon. We recommend you plan to stay nearby and complete your journey home on Sunday.

GETTING THERE

You will need to drive to get to Boulder, Utah. There are no nearby airports. The two closest airports are Salt Lake City and Grand Junction, Colorado, both about a 5-hour drive away. 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 as soon as the retreat is full, or two months before the trip to co-ordinate travel. Making the arrangements is your responsibility. If you know your plans before then, please let us know, or if you have a specific ride need (such as a ride from an airport), we can tell you if someone is coming from your area.

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/sign-up schedule. The first meal provided is dinner on Sunday, April 12th. The last meal provided is lunch on Saturday, April 18th.

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, 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 personal equipment weight to 25 pounds. You must carry up to two quarts of water, which adds four pounds, **plus up to 10-12 pounds of group food and equipment**. Your pack needs to be large enough to accommodate all of this. You may bring more, but remember--you will be carrying it! A clothing and equipment checklist is available from the website.

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), UV treatment (Steri-pen), 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.

We highly recommend you 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 Diver's Alert, 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.

TO APPLY

REGISTRATION

Please register online at www.desertharma.org. Be sure to complete the online **Registration Form**, which includes medical and practice questionnaires and a release form. For this retreat we do ask that you have at least 7 nights of residential retreat experience (these can be multiple retreats). A \$150 non-refundable deposit is required to reserve you a place until February 12th (60 days before the trip) when full payment is due. You can pay the deposit online or mail a check. If you are paying more than the deposit (or when you are paying your balance) we ask that you please send a check.

Make checks payable to Sky Mind Retreats and send to the retreat registrar: **Quilley Powers 1821 Fifth Avenue, D121, San Rafael, CA 94901** (please make the check out to **Sky Mind Retreats!**) Paying online for more than the \$150 deposit is an option, but we ask that you please add 3% to cover the fees.

Reservations are confirmed on a first-come, first-serve basis. Please fill out separate 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 waitlist. For this retreat we do ask that you have at least 7 nights of residential retreat experience (these can be multiple retreats).

PAYMENT INFORMATION

The full payment of \$300 - \$400 (sliding scale—you pick the amount) is due by February 12th (or at the time of registration if registering after February 12th.) If full payment is not received on time, the reservation may be canceled and the \$150 deposit forfeited. If you cancel after making your reservation, your \$150 deposit will be forfeited. If you cancel prior to February 12th, the \$150 deposit will be forfeited, but any additional amount paid will be refunded in full. If you cancel after February 12th, the \$150 deposit will be forfeited and any additional amount paid will only be partially refunded--Please see the refund terms listed below.

If you apply after February 12th, please include full payment with your registration.

A full refund, including deposit, will be made if you cancel from the wait list, or are still on the wait list when the retreat starts.

This is a private trip, with no commercial outfit running the trip or profiting from it. Any surplus from the trip balance will go to Sky Mind Retreats, a non-profit 501(c)3, in support of the Dharma. We calculate the costs very closely to just cover expenses.

Scholarships are available. We would like you to apply if you need support. Please write a short letter describing your situation and how much assistance you need. Please address your letter to Sky Mind Retreats. Please include this with your registration forms and your \$150 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, please consider it in your budget.

REFUND AND CANCELLATION POLICY

If Sky Mind Retreats finds it necessary to cancel a trip due to under-enrollment or other unexpected conditions, your deposit and any payments on the balance of the fee will be returned. This retreat tends to fill and we often have a waitlist. Because there are only 10 participant spaces on this retreat, it is important to let us know as soon as you can if you need to cancel. In order to respect those on the waitlist and to encourage timely cancellations, we have the following cancellation policy.

1. Cancellation received 60 or more days before retreat start date: Full refund minus \$150 non-refundable deposit.
2. 30 - 59 days before retreat start date: Refund of 25% of full retreat cost. If the retreat is full when it begins, we will refund 50%.
3. 30 days or less before retreat start date: We will not be able to offer any refund.

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 directions with details on when and where to meet and how to get there, will be sent later.

OBLIGATIONS OF RETREAT APPLICANTS

This is a private trip which means 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 and in consideration of the other retreatants, we ask that you be in good health and in shape for the backpacking (see description above.) 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 that 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 the retreat registrar Quilley Powers (quilley@yahoo.com) with your questions and concerns.