

# SKY MIND RETREATS

## **MEDITATION ON THE RIVER A CANOE RETREAT ON THE GREEN RIVER IN UTAH**

**Retreat Teacher: Susie Harrington**

**Cook: Jennifer Knochel**

**Guide: Lawrence Schuessler**

**September 5-12th, 2021 (8 days)**

**Cost: \$650 - \$850\* (+ staff & teacher support)**

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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**

**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 the interconnectedness, preciousness and beauty that surround 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 and will be held in Noble Silence and requires a commitment by each participant to this practice. Keeping noble silence for eight days in the wilderness is in itself a powerful practice.

**ON THIS RETREAT** the teacher, Susie, 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 & 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, Jennifer and Lawrence are, in the spirit of generosity, offering their 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, cook and wilderness guide in appreciation. The Dana you contribute provides essential support for them to continue their Dharma service. It will be warmly and gratefully received. There is no "suggested donation," and no donation is required to participate.

\* If you have your own canoe that you would like to bring, there is a \$100 discount per person fully outfitted (canoe, paddle, life jacket). Please contact us at registration if this applies to you.

**RETREAT TEACHER: Susie Harrington** teaches internationally, is the guiding teacher for Desert Dharma, and serves communities in the Southwest near her home in Moab, Utah. She has trained in the Insight tradition since 1989 and in 2005 was invited into teaching by Jack Kornfield and Guy Armstrong. She has also been influenced by her practice with Advaita, Dzogchen and Mahamudra teachers. Her teaching is deeply grounded in the body and often emphasizes the expression of mindfulness interpersonally and in daily life. Susie brings the skills of inquiry, relational dharma, and the psychological/spiritual interface from her training in Hakomi Therapy and the Diamond Approach. Believing nature to be a profound teacher, and a gateway to our true self, she often offers retreats outdoors. Susie has also been an outdoor professional for over 30 years, including years as a river guide, mountaineering guide, and backcountry ranger for the National Park Service.

## LOGISTICS

**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 Ruby Ranch and we will float through beautiful Labyrinth Canyon to Mineral Bottom. From there we will be shuttled up an amazing road out of the canyon back 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 Saturday September 4th for our group orientation*. We will leave early the next morning for the river put-in. We will finish on Sunday September 12th at approximately 4 pm. You will be responsible for your own dinner and lodging on September 4<sup>th</sup> and September 12th evenings before and after the trip (and breakfast on September 4<sup>th</sup>.)

There are many hotels, camping areas, bed and breakfasts, etc. in Moab. If you are planning to stay in Moab you should reserve a place for before and/or after the trip! It will be prime weather on the weekend when we put-in and Moab will be busy! Camping is usually available at that time of year, but it might be tight. 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 (Canyonlands Field) from Denver and Salt Lake City (SLC) on Skywest DBA United Express & Delta Connection. These flights are limited, please reserve early. Grand Junction is the next closest airport and it may be possible to connect those arriving by plane with those driving through that town. 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). There are also airports in Durango and Cortez, Colorado that you can check into (2-3 hour drive to Moab).

**COVID:** We expect that by the time of the retreat everyone will have access to the vaccine. Because it is not possible to load canoes, help each other in and out of the boats, etc., while constantly maintaining a 6-foot distance, we are requesting that everyone be fully vaccinated by the time of the retreat. If you have a contraindication or are unable to get the vaccine, please discuss this with us before accepting a place in the retreat.

## THE RIVER

We will be a party of 10 or so canoes. We will spend 4 -6 hours on the river each day (though this is dependent on water level, wind, etc.). Days will begin with meditation, then breakfast, after which we will break camp, load boats, and spend time on the river. River time is paddling meditation. Also, often Wind meditation. And 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, maintaining the larger sense of our group.

Lunch is usually held on the river. Afternoons we will have time for walking and sitting meditation, dharma teachings, or check-in circle. We will camp each night on a sand bar along the river. In camp, 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. 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 the 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; the choice is entirely up to each individual.

**WEATHER:** Early September on the river will most likely experience comfortable temperatures with an afternoon peak of hot temperatures. Plan for days in the 80's and 90's, with possible spikes into the 100-degree range, and cool nights (in the 50's-60s). 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 head net.

**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) is necessary. One will be provided (included in the fee) and you are welcome to bring your own. Lifejackets will also be provided with canoe rental unless you prefer to bring your own.

A clothing and equipment checklist is available on the website.

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

**MEALS:** Our breakfast, lunch and dinner menus are vegetarian and simple. Please tell us in advance of any dietary restrictions. 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, please bring them. Food, stoves and cooking/eating equipment are provided, but you need to **bring your own cup for hot drinks and 2 water bottles**. Cooking, cleanup and other camp duties are shared—you will sign up for a job. Please eat a good breakfast before we meet on the launch morning. We will provide lunch on the last day, but you are on your own for dinner that day.

**WATER:** We will be bringing all our water, in large containers, with us on the river. Please bring 2 one-quart water bottles for your daily water. All water used in camp for cooking will be boiled or filtered.

**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. The majority of accidents that occur on river trips happen on shore. River edges are slippery, and 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.

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.

## TO APPLY

**REGISTRATION:** Please register online at [www.desertdharma.org](http://www.desertdharma.org). Be sure to complete the online **Registration Form**, which includes medical and practice questionnaires and a release form. A \$200 non-refundable deposit is required to reserve you a place until June 5<sup>th</sup> (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 Keelin Schaffrath, [keelin@desertdharma.org](mailto:keelin@desertdharma.org). Paying online for more than the \$200 deposit is an option, but we ask that you please add 3% to cover the credit card fees.

There will be a lottery for the retreat with all applications that arrive between May 1 and 7. You will be notified on May 10<sup>th</sup> if you have a place in the retreat. If you do not pull a spot in the lottery, don't lose heart, we usually have cancellations. If you have to cancel, please let us know as soon as possible out of consideration for those on the waitlist.

Please fill out separate forms for each person. No payment (other than the required deposit) is necessary for those on the wait list. You will receive a full refund if you are not offered a spot, or are offered one too late to join.

**PAYMENT INFORMATION:** The full payment of \$650 - \$850 (sliding scale—you pick the amount) is due by June 5<sup>th</sup> (or at the time of registration if registering after June 5<sup>th</sup>). If full payment is not received on time, the reservation may be canceled and the \$200 deposit forfeited. If you cancel after making your reservation, your \$200 deposit will be forfeited. If you cancel prior to June 5<sup>th</sup>, the \$200 deposit will be forfeited, but any additional amount paid will be refunded in full. If you cancel after June 5<sup>th</sup>, the \$200 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 June 5<sup>th</sup>, 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.

Canoes will be rented for the trip. If you would like to bring your own canoe, we will be able to refund you \$100 of the trip cost. We will need to know ahead of time and after July 5<sup>th</sup> we cannot guarantee this refund.

**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 \$200 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 SMR 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. Due to the non-refundable reservation costs, if you find it necessary to cancel, your trip fee will be refunded according to the following schedule:

1. Cancellation received 90 or more days before retreat start date: Full refund minus \$200 non-refundable deposit.
2. 30 - 89 days before retreat start date: we will retain \$400 and return any amount paid above that.
3. 30 days or less before retreat start date: We will not be able to offer a 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 detailed directions 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 Keelin Schaffrath, [keelin@deserthharma.org](mailto:keelin@deserthharma.org).