

# THE FOREST HERMITAGE

April 2001 / 2544

# NEWSLETTER



## AT SANTIDHAMMA FOREST HERMITAGE:

SONGKRAHN  
THE THAI WATER FESTIVAL  
April 15th from 10.30 a.m.



VESAKHA PUJA  
Celebration of the Birth, Enlightenment & Passing of the Buddha.  
May 13th from 10.30 a.m.

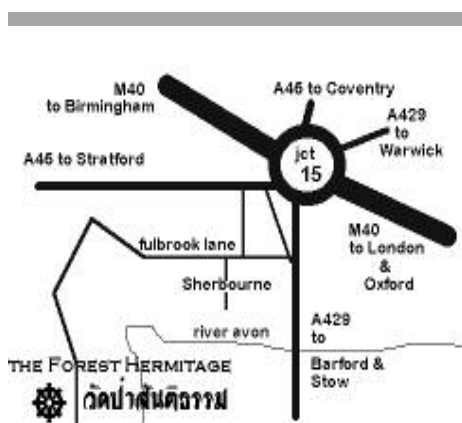


ANGULIMALA WORKSHOP  
(mainly for Buddhist Prison Chaplains)  
and A.G.M.

June 16th from 10 a.m.



MEDITATION,  
A DHAMMA TALK,  
a reading & a cup of tea.  
Mondays & Fridays at 8 p.m.



NAMO TASSE BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMASAMBUDDHASSA

**Honour to the Blessed One, the Exalted One, the Fully-Enlightened One**

In both the Angulimala Calendar and the Forest Hermitage Calendar that I produced for this year I have included on the page for March a photo of Osric, the extraordinary cockerel who used to parade around my garden, standing in front of the Buddha Rupa outside my window. He was, I believe, a White Crested Black Poland and very unusual. I called him Osric because he reminded me of the foppish character of that name in Shakespeare's 'Hamlet'. His slightly bizarre appearance almost always drew people to him and inevitably seeing him in the calendar has excited some interest and comments from those who never knew him. I use the past tense because during August of last year it became apparent that his life span was drawing to a close and he slipped from his perch, as must we all eventually. For some time, Georgeouse, the lame Sebastpol goose who started off as George and then laid an egg, and the black duck called Dum Dum had made a threesome with Osric and it didn't look quite right without him. Besides, I missed the sound of his crowing. So, a replacement was sought. At the friendly Cotswold Farm Park a personable young woman picked for us a magnificent and mature Welsummer cockerel and we brought him back and introduced him to the others. It's his picture in front of the Buddha Rupa outside my window which is at the top of this page.

Traditionally, in Buddhist iconography the cockerel is symbolic of lust or greed. Those of you familiar with the Tibetan Wheel of Life will remember that at its centre the root defilements of Greed, Hatred and Delusion are symbolised by a

cockerel, a snake and a pig. Where there is greed or hatred there will always be delusion since delusion is the parent of both greed and hatred. Unfortunately, it's not just greed but all three, greed, hatred and delusion that this particular cockerel has come to symbolise for us. It took a while to find a name for him. I tried several but none seemed quite to suit and all the while as time wore on his true character of an unashamed control-freak was becoming more and more apparent. Finally, it was his habit of coming up behind you and attacking when you were least suspecting it that inspired me to call him Casca. I don't know how historically correct this is but in Shakespeare's 'Julius Caesar' when the conspirators attack, the first blow is struck and Caesar is stabbed in the back by a nasty piece of work called Casca. So Casca is this cockerel's name now.

He is pictured, brilliantly coloured, red combed and burning with the fires of greed, hatred and delusion, standing unfortunately with his back to the serenely enthroned Image of the Buddha set amongst yellow spring daffodils that trumpet the Buddha's message of coolness and non-attachment.

Like most of the English countryside we are affected by the Foot & Mouth restrictions. So far, at the time of writing, the farms round here have remained infection free but the footpaths are all closed, the nature reserve opposite is closed and my morning and late night walks now are confined to plodding up and down the same strip of narrow, winding tarmac. Naturally, we have been concerned about how our Songkrahn and Vesakha Puja celebrations might be affected. The closure

of the wood opposite deprives us of the occasional use of their parking space when our car park overflows and the extreme wet weather makes it impossible for us to expand across our own land. We have spoken with our neighbour and if our car park is full we should be all right with parking along the verge, so long as people understand that in no circumstances may they venture onto the farmland or into the wood. So, please don't be afraid to come and see us, to join in our festivals and to attend the Monday and Friday evening meetings.

After several weeks of discussion and investigation a significant step has been made with our plan to tour the Buddhist Holy Places later this year. Ann Logan who lives not far from the Forest Hermitage has taken on the task of organising this and she has been negotiating with three different companies who each arrange slightly different versions of the same tour. One was Thai, another Indian and a third, a Sri Lankan couple who are based in India and whose business is called Serendib Tours. Serendib are well-known to people we know who have done the tour with them and it was they who seemed the keenest to offer us what we want. Therefore, it was Serendib Tours that we finally chose. They call the tour 'The Lotus Path'.

As most of you know very well, the Buddha was born at Lumbini (now just across the border into Nepal), realised Enlightened at Bodhgaya, gave his First Sermon at Sarnath, spent a great deal of his time at both Rajgir and Savatthi and finally passed away at Kusinara. These places are spread across hundreds of square miles of northern India and to visit them in the chronological order in which they appear in the Buddha's life would necessitate much criss-crossing of the same territory, adding hundreds of miles and several days to the journey and would be quite impractical. And it has been put to us that there could be some people who would like to come who would be unable to take more than the traditional two weeks holiday from work and also that it would be as well to have a day or two to play with in case of any upset. So, we've decided the tour will be of twelve days. It will start and finish at Delhi with two long train journeys conveying us to and from the area of the Holy Sites with about

another seven hundred miles by coach as we tour them. Then there will be an option for those who can to go on to Thailand for a few days to visit Wat Nong Pah Pong and pay our respects to Venerable Ajahn Chah at the cetiya containing his relics.

Having arrived and spent a night in Delhi we will board an early morning train for Varanasi, a distance of about five hundred miles taking just over twelve hours. Varanasi has historically been better known as Benares and is a little under ten miles from Sarnath where in the deer park at the

place marked by this cetiya the Buddha preached his First



Sermon to the five ascetics and thus set rolling the Wheel of Dhamma. Two nights are to be spent at Varanasi, enabling a full day of exploration in and around Sarnath. From there we will move on by coach another hundred and fifty miles to Bodhgaya - also frequently referred to as Buddhagaya - where at the age of thirty-five, the ascetic Gotama realised Full-Enlightenment and became the Buddha. As it stands, after two days in Bodhgaya, we are to move on to visit Rajgir - Rajagaha in Pali - one of the most ancient cities in the world where after his Enlightenment the Buddha spent his first Rains at Veluvana, the Bamboo Grove. This was donated by King Bimbisara and was the first piece of land and thus the first monastery to be acquired by the Sangha. Also at Rajgir is the Vulture's Peak, another place much favoured by the Buddha where he sometimes lived and taught. About eight miles from Rajgir on our way to Patna we will stop at Nalanda where at one time was established an enormous Buddhist university, the excavated ruins of which and

associated museum are well worth a visit. In case the day spent passing through Rajgir and Nalanda may be a bit of a squeeze I may try and change one of the nights in Bodhgaya for a night in Rajgir. After a night in Patna, about fifty miles from Nalanda, we will move on another two hundred miles or so to Kushinagar, en route calling at Vesali. Now, at Vesali, apart from one of the most complete and undamaged Ashokan pillars, there is little there to see but at one time it was a beautiful and prosperous city that the Buddha visited several times. It was there that Ambapali the courtesan presented to the Buddha and his disciples her spacious mango grove. At that time the Buddha was moving gradually and by stages on his last painful journey to Kusinara, or as it is called now, Kushinagar, where he passed away. We will spend one night at Kushinagar and the next morning visit the place of the Buddha's final passing and the remains of the cetiya where his body was cremated. Then that same afternoon we will be back on the coach and heading north and across the border into Nepal where that night we will stay at Lumbini, the birthplace of the then Buddha-to-be. After passing the following morning looking around and paying our respects, we will leave during the afternoon to cross back into India and journey on another hundred and seventy miles to Savatthi. There, we will have two nights, allowing us a full day to explore the famous Jetavana, the second monastery to be offered and established on land purchased at great price from Prince Jeta by the holy millionaire Anathapindika, and other surrounding sites of interest, including the Angulimala cave. And then the next day it will be off to Lucknow and the train back to Delhi.

First we had the idea of doing this pilgrimage and then I thought to associate it with my thirtieth vassa, rains retreat or punsah, as a monk. Really there's nothing very significant about the number thirty but it is a marker that somehow I would like to celebrate and how better? To complete it I want to go on to Thailand for a few days and with those who can join me pay our respects to the memory of Ven. Ajahn Chah under whom I trained.

Some details and a form are being circulated and I look forward to some of you joining me on this journey of a lifetime.

#### Uposatha Observance Days

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April	8	16	22	30
May	7	15	22	30
June	6	14	20	28

### THIS IS THE NEWSLETTER OF VEN. AJAHN KHEMADHAMMO OF SANTIDHAMMA FOREST HERMITAGE AND ANGULIMALA, THE BUDDHIST PRISON CHAPLAINCY ORGANISATION

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