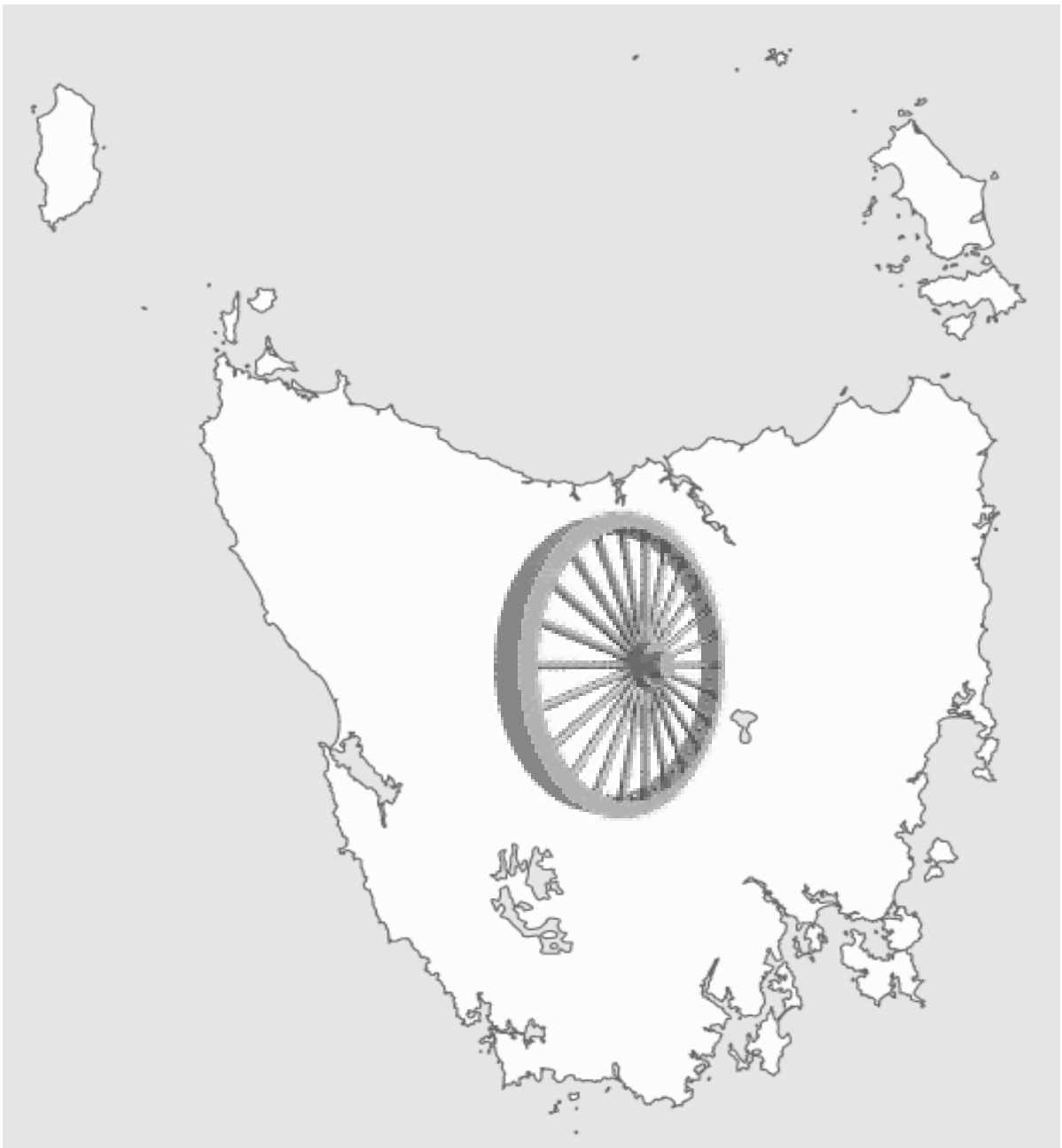


The Growth of Vipassana in Tasmania



1983-2023

Compiled by devoted old students and teachers of the
Vipassana meditation centre: *Dhamma Pabha*

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Building the Dwelling of the Dhamma by S.N. Goenka

The hour of Vipassana has struck at many places throughout the world. For years, devoted students from many countries have worked hard to make the Dhamma available to others. Now, with the development of many centres around the world, their efforts are coming to fruition.

The establishment of centres marks a new stage in the spread of Vipassana. It is important to understand its significance.

Centres for Vipassana meditation are not clubs designed for the enjoyment of their members. They are not temples in which to perform religious ceremonies. They are not places for socialising or entertainment. They are not communes where members of a sect can live in isolation from the outside world according to their own particular rules.

Instead, centres are schools that teach one subject: Dhamma, the art of living. All who come to these centres whether to meditate or to serve, come to receive this teaching. They must therefore be receptive in their attitude, trying not to impose their ideas, but rather to understand and to apply the Dhamma that is offered.

To ensure that the Dhamma is offered in its strength and purity, there is strong discipline at the centres. The more carefully it is maintained, the stronger the centre will be. Many ordinary activities are forbidden by the discipline, not because there is anything wrong with them, but because they are inappropriate at a centre for Vipassana meditation. Remember, these are the only places where one can learn this type of Vipassana. The discipline is a way of preserving the unique purpose of these centres; it should be guarded carefully.

The foundation of the edifice of Dhamma that is being constructed at these centres is sila (moral conduct). Practising sila is the essential first step in a Vipassana course since, without it, meditation will be weak. It is equally essential that all who serve at the centres keep the Five Precepts as carefully as possible. The rule of Dhamma has been established at these centres, and there should be no killing on Dhamma land, no stealing, no sexual activity, no wrong speech, no use of intoxicants. This will create a calm and peaceful atmosphere conducive to the work of self-purification.

With the firm base of sila, the practice of self-purification can proceed. Keep in mind that this is the most important tasks at the centres--first, last and always. All who come to serve at them, even for a few hours, must not neglect their duty to meditate there as well. By doing so, the Dhamma atmosphere gets strengthened and support is given to other meditators.

Vipassana meditation in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin as taught by S.N. Goenka

Vipassana is a simple technique of observing reality as it naturally occurs. It has nothing to do with any sect or religion and involves no ritual or unquestioning faith. It teaches self-dependence and involves no subjection to a guru. The emphasis is on achieving a balanced, equanimous mind with which to lead a happy, useful life.

Vipassana has been handed down by a chain of teachers to the present day. In our time it is taught by S. N. Goenka of India, who has introduced many thousands of people around the world to Vipassana meditation.

The technique is taught in ten-day residential courses, during which participants learn the basics of the technique and practise sufficiently to experience its beneficial effects.

1. Bringing Vipassana to Tasmania

During the 1970s, a number of Australians practiced Vipassana meditation in India under the direction of Mr. S. N. Goenka (respectfully and affectionately known as 'Goenkaji'). When these travelers returned, many wished to continue practicing and sitting courses locally. Goenkaji was first invited to conduct courses in Sydney, New South Wales and Perth, Western Australia, in 1980.

In 1981, Goenkaji appointed the first assistant teachers, who were given the responsibility of conducting courses as his representatives, using the recordings of his teachings. This opened the way for the first Vipassana Centre in Australia, Dhamma Bhumi, New South Wales, initially developed between 1981 and 1983.

Assistant teachers associated with Dhamma Bhumi began to conduct courses around Australia, responding to invitations from old students located in other parts of the country. One of those assistant teachers was invited to conduct a course in Tasmania.

This first course in Tasmania was held in a small township in the North East region, in January 1983. Twenty-two students attended (9 old and 13 new). It was at the end of that course that the first Vipassana Tasmania Trust was founded.

Courses held at other non-Centre sites 1984-1994

Under the guidance of the foremost senior assistant teacher from New South Wales, the newly-formed Trust decided to hold further non-Centre courses, based on the success of the first.

As more Tasmanians were introduced to Vipassana, more courses were organised by small groups of old students using rented facilities. An ever-increasing group of dedicated old students facilitated a total of 18 non-Centre courses in Tasmania, conducted over a ten-year period, serving 344 full-time and 41 part-time students during this time. These courses were largely made up of locals, drawn from the relatively small population of Tasmania at the time. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Tasmania had a population of 437,800 in 1984, rising to 472,900 in 1994.

These non-centre sites, commonly known as ‘gypsy camps’ were quite demanding – a huge undertaking. We had to seek out venues and visit in advance to ensure they were fit for purpose. There was a tremendous amount of coordination and preparatory work. It required three truckloads of equipment including a tape deck, meditation mats, cushions, visiting assistant teacher/s’ bedding, etc., etc.

Over this time there were several different sites used to hold these courses, each with their own idiosyncrasies. These were located in Dover, Port Huon, Bellerive, Claremont, Southport, and Campbell Town. While numbers varied, it is worth noting that there were a number of courses with over 40 participants.

While these courses were initially conducted by visiting assistant teachers, this decade saw a number of Tasmanians appointed as assistant teachers conducting courses in their home state.

2. Establishing Dhamma Pabha

Storing, setting up and dismantling these camps was a major task, and the local meditators recognised the need for a permanent place for Vipassana meditation courses.

In addition, travel to the closest centre, Dhamma Bhumi, was limited, as air fares were relatively high and there were other significant costs associated with travel.

So, it was at this time that a small group decided to develop a Tasmanian centre. We were a small group of dedicated old students who were clear and unified in our volition to have our own Centre in Tasmania. The Trust had some dana and pledges towards this goal so set about looking for appropriate land. The Trust carefully considered its financial capacity (i.e. dana accumulated from past courses, private loans and pledges made by old students, and land sales).

Eventually one of this group saw a newspaper advertisement for land for sale (described as ‘God’s Own Country’) at Upper Dromedary. The owners were a lovely

old couple who were retiring. Their family wasn't interested in inheriting the property, which included the family home and an established garden, therefore they wanted to sell the land.

The land was a total of 268 acres on five titled blocks. It was very private and secluded and had been used in the past as a fruit farm. It included an existing well kept four bedroom house as well as a run down old dwelling near the entrance.

A few Trustees went to view the land and thought it would be very suitable. Unfortunately, we were 'pipped at the post' as there was another party interested in buying it and they got in first. Also, we hadn't raised the full amount of money required. Although initially we were disappointed, this did not lessen our determination because we were quietly confident that the Dhamma would eventually lead us in the right direction. We continued looking and three months later we got a call from the estate agent saying the other party couldn't raise the collateral and the land was up for sale again.

The next step was to get in touch with the foremost senior assistant teacher at that time, from New South Wales, as he was in regular contact with Goenkaji in India. We invited him to come down to Tasmania and have a look at the land and to provide us with some advice as to its suitability. We were so enthusiastic – we rang him on a Tuesday and asked him to come down on Wednesday or Thursday. He very kindly arrived a few days later, that same week, flying down from Sydney for the day.

The day was foggy and wet. He was shown around the land and, as we took him back to the airport, we eagerly asked him 'what do you think?' After some reflection, he said, 'I think it is suitable'. The next step was that he would contact Goenkaji and seek his advice. Following the outcome of that phone call, it was arranged that we could phone Goenkaji directly and discuss it with him.

When the time came, we rang Goenkaji's number and he picked up the phone to talk with us. He asked a number of questions about the property, for example, if there was anyone living directly above, or close by, and what had the land been used for in the past. He requested some photographs of the property, which we sent. Subsequently he wrote approving the land and, in that letter, named the land **Dhamma Pabha**, which means *Radiance or Glow of Dhamma*.

Initially, to enable the purchase of the land, an old student couple signed an unconditional contract, using their family home as collateral. This bought the land, trusting that the required amount would be raised by dana in time for the settlement date. Most of the money was raised by loans, pledges, and donations. Fortunately, on the eve of settlement, when a modest sum remained outstanding, a meditator couple stepped forward and paid the last amount. Phew!

Settlement occurred on 16 October 1992.

The Trust decided that they would subdivide the land and sell some blocks to meditators. This would sever the Eastern title - which included the old, rundown dwelling by the entrance gate - from the property. A surveyor was engaged to undertake this work. A Council planner was also consulted and severance was undertaken (see chart below). This enabled the payment of legal fees, surveying, and to extend and upgrade the existing access road to the Centre.

Not only did we take ownership of the land, we also inherited an old draft horse called Nugget. Nugget had lived on the property all his life and was free to roam around the acreage. This was an unexpected responsibility as he required care and feeding. At that time, we were only meeting monthly at the Centre and holding one and three day courses at the house. He missed human company. Eventually he was taken to another property in the vicinity and lived out the remainder of his days as a draft horse for weddings.

The Trust became incorporated in 1993. One of the meditators was a lawyer who kindly and generously donated her time to do all the legal work, therefore saving on considerable legal expenses.

“The Cottage”

The property immediately adjacent to Dhamma Pabha, 340 Clarks Road, was subdivided from the original centre property and sold to old students. Through a fortunate set of circumstances, the property has more recently (2021) come full circle and is once again part of the centre.

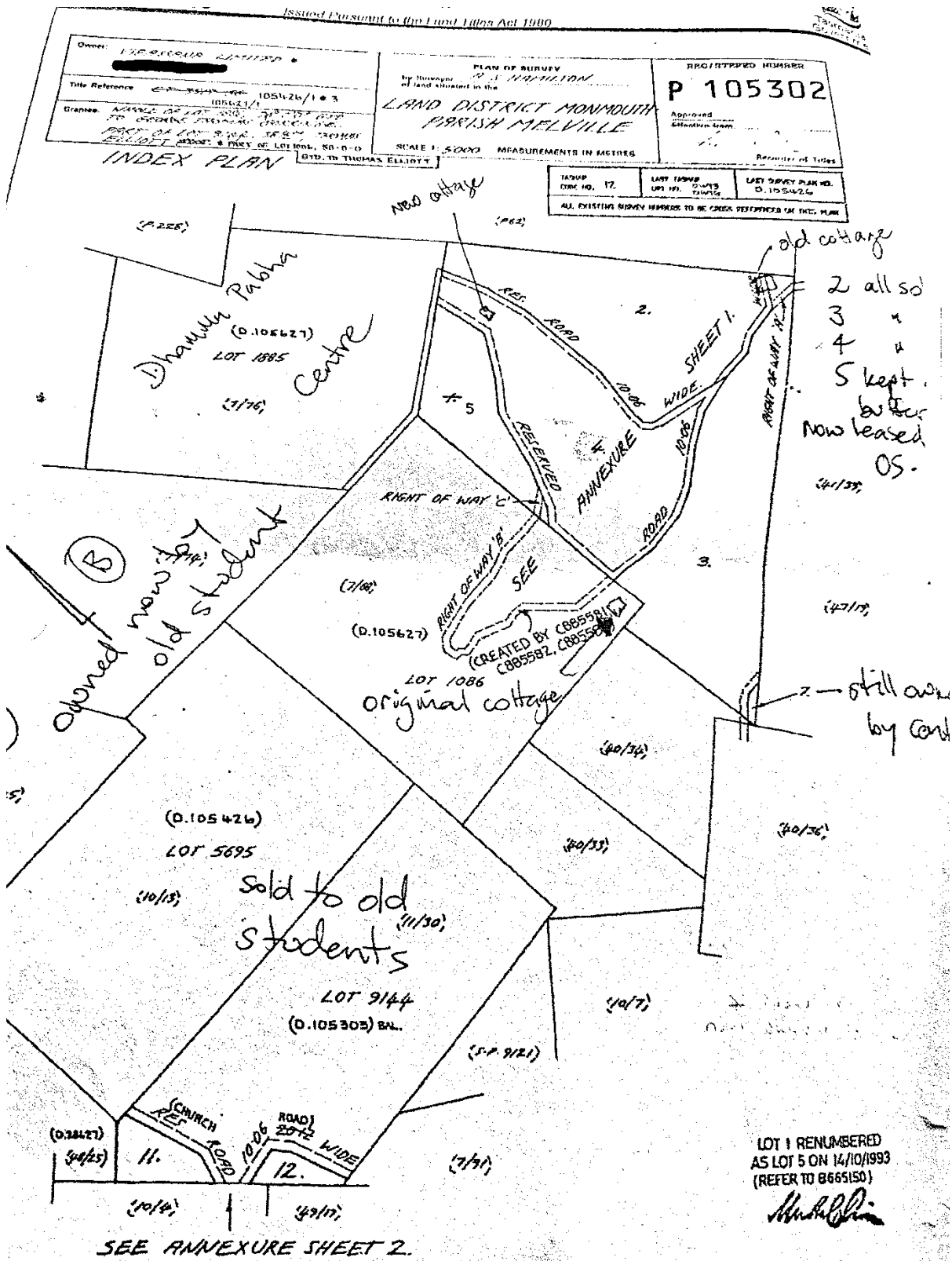
After trying unsuccessfully for some years to sell the property to old students, the land was put up for sale on the open market. Despite efforts from the local Dhamma community to find an old student buyer, the property was promptly purchased by non-meditators.

The senior Teachers of Dhamma Pabha were sitting a long course at Dhamma Bhumi during this time and were unaware that the sale had taken place until after they finished the course. Upon receiving the news on the second Metta Day of the course, the centre teachers told some of the other course participants what had happened.

Most fortunately, one of the course participants offered to donate the money to purchase the land, providing the sale had not closed and it was not too late to make a better offer.

Happily, Dhamma Pabha's bid was successful. The Cottage is now long-term servers' accommodation.

Division of property at 358 Clarks Rd, Dromedary TAS 7030



3. Building Dhamma Pabha

Construction begins: the Centre's access road

The road itself is approximately two kilometers long. When first acquired by the Centre, it was just a rough track with its route passing through Crown Land (known as a reserved road). Its direction turned sharply upstream from the house across a creek and continued on at an extremely steep gradient to rejoin the track at the top of the Centre plateau. It was obvious from the start that it would never meet the demands of much traffic, especially cars, for many, many years to come.

So, the first task for the Trust was to consult the Lands Department regarding the reserved road section and their advice was to create a right of way as a separate title, hence anyone who is entitled to access would be given right of way on the Centre road.

Knowing the outcome from the Lands Department, we could now take the next step and engage road engineers to design a proper access road. Their plans were submitted to the local council and approved. From there we went on to employ a road contractor to upgrade the existing part of the road and build a new section that would connect up top with the existing old road on the Centre plateau.

It was a costly undertaking for a fledgling Centre to meet. Fortunately, by then, we had sold some blocks of land so we could meet the expenses.

Goenkaji advised us to start meditating on the land right away to build up the Dhamma vibrations. At first, we did so sitting on the ground under the trees. The site was largely undisturbed forest, with a clearing where the current Dhamma Hall sits that many years past had been a strawberry patch.

We used the house to hold our monthly Trust meetings. Facilities at the house had to be upgraded in order to hold one and three-day courses. Some years later, the house was sold to an old student.

We were very happy that we had come this far. However, the time had come to decide where exactly on Dhamma Pabha we would establish a Centre. There were two areas within the property the Trust had been looking at and we couldn't decide which would be most suitable. There was a lot of discussion about this at our meetings. Finally, we invited an assistant teacher from Queensland to facilitate a meeting, as she had done for other Centres. It was a very fruitful meeting. As a result, it became clear that we should establish the permanent Centre higher up on the property, where the land was flatter and secluded.

It has been shown that many obstacles and hurdles have to be faced and overcome in the early development of Vipassana Centres. The pattern seems to be that extraordinary challenges and circumstances present in the most unexpected ways. Despite these, our volition and faith never waned or waived.

Buildings

WORDS OF DHAMMA

*Sheltering and conducive to concentration and insight,
a place of meditation is praised by Enlightened Ones
as the greatest gift to the Sangha.*

*Therefore a wise man, considering his own welfare,
should build pleasant dwellings in which those
who have heard much about the Dhamma may stay [and practice it].*

– Vinaya, Cullavagga, V1.1 (147)

The limitation of the Centre's rudimentary facilities naturally restricted the number of students who could attend courses. So as the Centre starts to evolve the mark of a new phase begins with a building program.

In 1993, a Centre Development Day was organised. It brought the local Dhamma community together to share ideas and have some input. From that an *interim* Building Plan emerged.

The Assistant Teachers accommodation was the first building constructed on the new site. The Centre was blessed to be served by a number of skilled and semi-skilled builders who helped design and build it. The simple room was positioned low on the course compound, above where the marquee was to be erected. It was designed to be transported further up the hill when the permanent Dhamma Hall was built.

After that, the first priority – approved by the Trust – was to build a meditation hall to seat 30 students. Plans for a meditation hall were drawn up and submitted to the local council authorities. Much to our disappointment, the paperwork did not meet council requirements as the Development Application needed to include a fire management plan, which had not yet been created. This was the start of a long 'learning curve' for the Trust as we learnt to manage the practicalities of Centre development.

In 1997, two experienced meditator builders oversaw the construction of the Dhamma Hall. They described the laying of the concrete slab as one of the hardest they've done. A team of meditators poured the slab in the morning in clear weather,

but as the day progressed a number of rain showers pock-marked the freshly finished surface. The builders re-finished the surface about four times between showers, one of them continuing the work after midnight. Despite their efforts, further rain left the surface in poor condition.

Over the following months, a team of Dhamma servers worked on the building, racing against time to complete it before the first course commenced. Work continued on the Hall until late in the day before the course began – this included wrapping the timber framed walls in sisalation (the only cladding we had for the course) and fitting the doors. Around 5pm, the Assistant Teacher conducting the course had to check with the building team whether the Hall would be ready.

An integral step in building the Dhamma Hall was relocating the Teachers Residence from lower in the compound. The move involved bolting a long axle under the middle of the building, attaching wheels and hitching it to the back of a four-wheel drive. In a hair-raising journey, it was towed through the compound and around trees – catching branches on the way but breaking no more than a corner of the roofing frame, and leaving the residence shaken but intact.

The kitchen included two bedrooms, with shared sleeping accommodation for four servers, storage and a small office.

The student accommodation consisted of four modules (two for males and two for females) each with six separate rooms. Emphasis has always been given in accommodating students comfortably in single rooms, although there is lack of private bathrooms particularly for older and less hardy students. (However, this situation will be addressed in the not too distant future.)

The dining hall was constructed opposite the kitchen, with separate entrances and eating areas for male and female students.

It was obvious from the start that Dhamma Pabha would not be able to pay builders and tradespeople. However, we were fortunate in having the help of local meditators with building experience who donated their time and expertise, over a period of years. Therefore, costs could be kept to a minimum.

Although we didn't appreciate it at the time, looking back, it was such a significant start to participate in creating a structure that would serve many, many students over many years to come.

Utilities

Electricity had to be taken from the house to the Centre site. This meant that it passed through three different title-holder's land and written permission had to be

obtained before we could proceed. In the meantime, the only alternative was to use a generator.

A phone cable was laid and connected to the house. This was relocated to the Centre site later on.

We had to apply for Council approval to install a septic tank system for the toilets. Portable ablutions blocks were provided by an old student. These needed a lot of cleaning initially, but they have served us very well over the years. They have been repaired and improved over time.

With many, many work periods over the years the centre has developed significantly since that wilderness experience with its rudimentary facilities on that first course in 1995. Those who helped in such work, whether in the past or future, have the satisfaction of knowing that their time has been well spent in helping to build the 'Dwelling of the Dhamma'.

First ten-day course

The first ten-day course was to be held 26 December 1994 until 8 January 1995. Delays in the building program meant that creative solutions were needed for shelter, including the meditation hall.

With the date set, a small band of servers worked over many weekends and in the weeks leading up to the course to complete the AT accommodation, erect the marquee, position the ablutions blocks and connect the plumbing.

Initially the thought was to hire a marquee, the kind they use for weddings, to act as a meditation hall. However, demand for these structures over the Christmas-New Year period meant that every available marquee in Tasmania had already been booked.

What to do!

It was decided to have a marquee made locally but that in itself presented a problem as the local manufacturer didn't have enough material and couldn't get it from the mainland as it was the holiday period.

So a solution was to make it from new material off-cuts. This was very successful. The Trust bought the marquee for \$1000 and it served the Centre in different ways for many years. We put plastic on the ground to make it waterproof.

On registration night, the visiting assistant teacher from New South Wales, who was conducting the course had to carry the Dhamma table into the structure. In terms of timing, it was a very close shave to have all the students registered and have the

structure ready to start on time. We had to use lanterns. It was unforgettable. The AT was very concerned about starting on time

The first ten-day courses on Centre land were held using a generator to provide power for the site. The TV used for the discourses was run on a car battery stored under the Dhamma seat. It was discovered that, when fully charged, the battery had enough power to run the TV for one discourse. We learnt this when halfway through Goenkaji's discourse the following evening it went flat. At the conclusion of the course, it was found that the white cloth cover in front of the Dhamma seat was eaten through with holes by acid from the battery!

It was necessary to hire two porta-loos. It was also necessary for the course manager to clean off all the graffiti before the course got going!

Some tents were also hired for accommodation. The assistant teachers' accommodation was a small, temporary, purpose-built structure. On the course after that, the course manager's accommodation was a combi van.

The house had a kitchen where we could prepare the meals. The Dhamma servers would go down to prepare the food after the 8am-9am group sitting and then deliver it to the site just before 11am. The meditators could hear the car rattling up the road. We had makeshift dining rooms that resembled tunnel greenhouses, made from clear plastic and semi-circular ribs. The students sat on tree stumps from Dhamma Pabha that had been cut by chainsaw, with cushions. While temporary, these structures were much loved by most students because of the atmosphere they created inside, so close to nature. Their disadvantages emphasised the necessity to plan for future construction.

The first course was very, very hard. All that added work to pack the food so that it would not spill on the trip from the kitchen to the course site. It was cold and there was no electricity. In addition, the Dhamma vibrations were not built up on the land. But it was our first ten-day course and we were so happy about that.

Even though the conditions were very rough we always put out little things for the students like tissues, hot water bottles, extra blankets and this has been very much appreciated over the years.

Goenkaji appointed a Centre Teacher couple from the mainland, to serve Dhamma Pabha. So now the local Trust and old student community could work under their guidance and with their support. (Some years later, Dhamma Pabha Tasmania, brought forth its own local Centre Teacher, and several local assistant teacher appointments).

4. Land at Dhamma Pabha

Initially, our time was tied up with establishing the Centre. But, as the years went by, we began to appreciate the extraordinary beauty of the Dhamma land, its flora and fauna. Not only did we inherit the land and Centre, but we also had a responsibility to protect it. (Under law, this land is listed as a *Biodiversity Protection Area*.) Briefly ...

Against the backdrop of Mount Dromedary, the underlying geology of Dhamma Pabha land has a stony base which shows the impressions of shells and sea life from eons past. This supports a thick layer of clay, which is topped by a thin layer of sandy loam soil.

The vegetation *understory* is dominated by native grasses and sedges. *A variety of native shrubs and herbs* grow on the meditation campus. The *tree canopy* is dominated by blue gums. Other eucalypt trees, such as stringybark, black peppermint and white peppermint are scattered throughout.

Many bird, reptile and insect species inhabit the land. Frogs may be heard calling from the dam and other water sources on the property. Bats, quolls, bandicoots, wallabies, Tasmanian devils, possums, echidnas and wombats may also be seen.

In February 1995, as an integral part of the design concept, the Trust proposed to create an attractive landscape of endemic Tasmanian flora where possible. A native plant expert was consulted and, on visiting the site, he suggested many ideas about landscaping and recommended suitable native species for planting.

Bushfire season

Dhamma Pabha's tranquil forest location is so ideal for meditation courses. Although the risk of bush fires has always been a concern, it has been even more so since January 2003 when a fire swept through the Centre and surrounding areas. This direct account from one old student describes how a small group saved the Centre from fire on one such occasion.

It was in January 2003, I think. The call (yes, by landline!) went out mid-morning for anyone who was able to come as there was a fire on the North-East side about 4kms away being blown towards the Centre. I was able to go and arrived there mid-morning.

The fire had just reached outside the fence line. It was on a wide front, moving slowly but steadily and mainly burning the undergrowth. There were about 18 of us in total, including some friends of meditators.

We decided to try to keep the fire on the other side of the fence. We spread out in a long line along the fire front, fighting it with variations of the 'mop and bucket' method.

The fire was moving quickly because the breeze was getting stronger. We had been joined by a Tas Fire volunteer team and they stayed with us for the rest of the day helping and advising us. We realised we had to forget about fence lines and work on keeping the inner compound safe.

The wind had picked up and was fanning the flames. Suddenly, the fire front split, one side burning up the hill and the other side down the hill towards the kitchen.

We broke into two groups to try and keep the fire at bay but by then the flames were running up the tree trunks and sending burning embers into the compound. So as we tried to contain the front, we also had to watch behind us for spot fires and race to douse them before they took hold.

We had no idea what was happening down at the kitchen. The fire was racing up towards the Meditation Hall and we were hoping that we could at least keep the cleared area under control.

But no, the fire was moving faster than we were and we had to accept we were going to lose the Hall. But somehow the fire moved up, ran along well above the Hall, then across the hill into the bush on the male side. We didn't have time to breathe a sigh of relief as the fire suddenly took off again, swung round and raced back down the hill through the bush.

We were hoping it was moving away from us as the flames were roaring through the trees. But the Easterly wind arrived and the fire came raging back into the inner compound, scorching hot and impossible to stop. The Firies called to us that they would stay and we were to get into the Hall for safety. So we dropped everything and took off. Then we realised the Firies were retreating and that the whole Centre was lost.

We were stunned...but just kept running.

Then the strangest thing happened. The wind dropped, the fire stopped burning towards us and continued to burn down the hill towards the AT's road. And we hadn't even reached the Hall. The Firies were as relieved as us but went off down the hill following the fire and we went around the compound putting out any small fires that were still burning. By then it was late afternoon.

We all came back to the Kitchen in dribs and drabs...exhausted but so relieved. A Fire officer came to break the news to us that the road out was impassable as there were fallen trees across the road and we would have to stay at the Centre overnight. The

compound was safe but huge gums were slowly burning at their base and then crashing to the ground. We would need to check around the perimeter regularly all night. The only accommodation block that was useable was F1 with six rooms and that meant there were only six beds. Some of the younger ones were happy to doss down in a van. The rest of us teamed up into two's with six sleeping for the first shift and the others monitoring the compound and then switching over halfway through the night.

We were able to leave next morning. It was very eerie driving down the road with everywhere completely burnt but fortunately no one hurt and no houses burnt.

We were very fortunate that the kitchen was well stocked and even luckier that others had come to the Centre that morning to prepare for the next course. They took on the task of looking after us and feeding us. As we didn't stop all day, they came round regularly with drinks and food and were able to cook up a feed for us in the evening. I had the best cup of tea ever.

They came round with a big pot of strong, sweet tea and that was it...no choice understandably! I drank weak milky tea with no sugar at the time. But I drank it, of course. It was just what I needed...perfect.

The only buildings at the time were the Hall, the Kitchen, the ATs residence, and F1 with M1 (student accommodation) under construction, I think. The plastic tunnels were used as Dining rooms and a Marquee was still in place. Amazingly, despite burning embers falling everywhere, the only damage was a small burn to the Marquee and one to the side of the maleMale tunnel.

Goenkaji was kept informed of the fire's progress and wrote afterwards that he appreciated *"the timely service given by the local meditators. Such service in the time of crisis is of special importance. These meditators have acquired immense merits by saving a meditation Centre."*

Summertime now poses serious problems due to climate change and to date two evacuations during courses have had to be carried out. This is very concerning as it causes serious disturbance to courses especially as students can be quite vulnerable and sensitive.

5. Towards establishing an open Centre

Overcoming these hurdles, the Tasmanian Vipassana community supported an increase in number of courses as the years went on. The student numbers have grown steadily over the years. In this small Island State, six ten-day courses, for

example, have been conducted annually from 1995 to 2016. By 2017, for the first time, eight 10-day courses were held, in addition to a Sattipathanna course. The number of short courses also increased, with several one-day courses being held at Launceston and Penguin, in the north and northwest of the state.

Subsequently, twenty-day courses are held bi-annually. As the attendance numbers continue to increase so too has it been necessary to schedule additional courses accordingly.

There is no doubt about it, Dhamma Pabha provides an increasingly attractive tranquil forest environment for deep and serious meditation.

Children's courses

Children's courses are one-day introductory course in meditation for children and teenagers aged 8 to 17 years.

During the course, children learn the technique of Anapana meditation.

Generally, children's courses in Tasmania are held at Dhamma Pabha. These are open to the children of old students, as well as those children whose parents haven't had any contact with Vipassana.

One time someone put posters on the back window of her car and a child came along because her grandmother saw it. Subsequently, the grandmother went on to sit a ten-day course.

The children are so engaged with meditation. They are interested and really try hard. It is lovely to see children at the meditation centre – there is lots of laughing and games – which is a bit different to when adults are there, and we have fun food – party food. You get gold and silver stars on your feet because they spread them on the floor. It is a bit of a different place even when there are only five or six children. It makes it feel more part of the community – we are householders we are not monks.

At the end of each course, we ask the children what was the best thing about the day, what would they like to be different or better, what did they enjoy - about four or five questions. A lot of the children say that they like the peace and the calm of the place. They say they like learning meditation and that they will use it at home and they like making new friends. One child, who hadn't been introduced to reading or writing yet, drew a little picture of a boy with the breath coming in and the breath coming out.

So, when they practice metta they send it to their mother and father and to their school mates. Adults sit there quietly but children say it out loud. People wishing their Mum and Dad to be happy and peaceful.

Fun is probably the word that you would apply for the children's courses for the children and for the servers. A lot of servers like serving on children's courses – it is easy, and it is fun. You come away feeling happy, like the world is a good place!

6. Dhamma service

WORDS OF DHAMMA

The Buddha said that two types of people are rare. One type is the person who serves, who takes initiative in serving, who has no thought about anything other than service – bahujanahitaya, bahujanasukhaya (for the good and happiness of many). My service is to help others; more and more people should benefit from it. The second type is the person who has a feeling of gratitude. Develop these two qualities and certainly you are progressing on the path, certainly you are fit to help others.

Every course is served by a minimum of four full-time Dhamma servers. Servers are old students who have completed at least one course and can be a mix of local and, interstate meditators and travelers.

Accommodation for servers was always a limiting factor for accepting part time servers, meditators who might only be able to find two or three days to serve on a course. The caravans, which provided some server accommodation would only cater for two servers each and were a squeeze even so.

Both the servers' accommodation, and the caravans, had reported the mysterious disappearance of footwear, from time to time. One patient server became overwhelmed when, on several occasions, his footwear was first nibbled, and then removed, by nocturnal visitors outside his caravan.

Some meditators develop the volition to serve, having sat just one course. Occasionally someone is able to stay at the Centre for a period of days, weeks or even months.

Whether working to clear ditches, or cooking a fresh loaf of bread, communicating with our gas supplier or taxi service, our server team are all motivated to ensure a smoother meditation environment for the coming students. Dhamma service may mean that meditators need to work together to plan and organise course matters or Centre facilities. A building program has been maintained since the Centre's inception, requiring countless hours of Dhamma work by many, many servers.

Trained meditators also work behind the scenes as registrars to complete the administration tasks required to deal with student applications to sit or serve courses.

All of this service is provided on a voluntary basis, course after course, to keep the wheel of Dhamma turning. Hundreds of volunteers over the years have contributed to supporting and helping others to progress on the path.

Dhamma Pabha is a place to restore and replenish, in peace and quiet, and beauty in nature. But above all, it is where the Dhamma is practiced and taught. And, as Goenkaji reminds us, “Keep in mind that it is the most important task at the Centres, first, last and always.”

A long-time server’s perspective

Serving others on the path of Dhamma is a privilege. I have found it a good opportunity for self-observation. Being there for others, my mind is clearer, more alert, and more in the moment. Compassion has also been a big part of the learning and working intuitively. Acceptance and patience come to mind and definitely a sense of purpose.

7. Publicity in Tasmania

While many of the students who attend courses at Dhamma Pabha are interstate or overseas travelers, there have been great efforts to promote Vipassana to the Tasmanian population.

Over the years, a small network of meditators have regularly distributed posters around shops and public notice boards, with great success. Currently, many of the promotional materials are available at <https://pabha.dhamma.org/>.

In the past, in line with Vipassana Centres around the world, Tasmania has also undertaken outreach to the prison population. An AT and an old student presented the screening of the film *Doing Time, Doing Vipassana*. About 15-20 inmates and some prison officers attended.

Open Day - This was an occasion when Dhamma Pabha opened its doors and extended its hospitality to those who may not have taken a course themselves but are interested and may have family or friends who have sat a course. Or are just curious about the Centre’s relationship to the wider community. The event was very well attended, and the feedback encouraging.

In addition, experience has proven that the value of word-of-mouth cannot be underestimated in the spread of Dhamma. Many old students have inspired friends and family members take courses.

8. The COVID-19 pandemic

Covid-19 first impacted Dhamma Pabha during a ten day course in March 2020. Covid had already began sweeping across the rest of the world at the time this course started and within those ten days it reached Tasmania.

Participants from the rest of Australia and the world were on the course. As news of the restrictions and lock downs being enforced throughout Australia reached Dhamma Pabha, we realised that the course participants would emerge to face a whole new reality, on more than one level.

One student from the USA was contacted by his concerned parents half way through the course and told to take the next plane home. Others found that their flights from Hobart had been cancelled, while those planning on staying on after the course to spend time sightseeing in Tasmania, tried to find early flights home. One long term server from Canada, who had not been home in over six years, managed to book a ticket on the last flight out of Melbourne bound for the USA.

The Tasmanian government hastened to contain a cluster of infections in the North West of the state by enforcing a three month lockdown. During this time, Dhamma Pabha was forced to cancel a 10 day course scheduled for April and a 20 day course in May.

Fortunately, infections were brought under control and the state began to gradually lift restrictions in June 2020. Dhamma Pabha was able to run a 10 day course in July with all the necessary Covid restrictions in place, including a limit of 12 students, four servers and two ATs.

In addition, Tasmania, being an island state, had border restrictions until late 2021. This resulted in Dhamma Pabha being attended largely by Tasmanian residents, thus increasing the local old student population. This situation was reminiscent of the earlier years when the Centre was becoming established. At that time all students were Tasmanians. Over the years, however, as travel became easier and cheaper, up to two thirds of course participants have been from interstate or overseas.

Dhamma Pabha remained 'Covid free' until late 2021.

9. Conclusion

Growth of Dhamma in Tasmania

Ehi-Passiko

There are many factors responsible for the growth of Dhamma, including many students giving service in many ways; but the single most important factor is the quality of Dhamma itself, the quality of Ehi-Passiko – “Come and see”.

It is now almost 40 years since Vipassana Meditation, in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin came to Tasmania. At the time we did not realise that the journey we were about to embark upon would last decades. Thanks to all the hard work these efforts have borne abundant fruit.

Demand for Vipassana courses continue to increase. Courses are now held throughout the year in Tasmania at Dhamma Pabha.

At the time of writing, Dhamma Pabha is one of eight Centres in Australia and New Zealand and one of 255 Centres around the world. Since the turn of the century, over 3000 meditators have sat courses at Dhamma Pabha.

Building on this base, into the future, will allow many more to come into contact with Dhamma, in Tasmania, in Australia and throughout the world.

Dhamma Pabha is now a place to restore and to replenish in nature in peace and quiet and beauty. But above all it is where the Dhamma is taught and practiced and as Goenkaji explains keep in mind that it is the most important tasks at the centre first last and always.



10. Appendix: A brief summary of development works

- In preparation for first course, a tool shed was built near the main entrance and subsequently moved to its present location as the assistant teacher's accommodation. It was then fitted out to make it habitable. The bathroom was added later.
- Two poly tunnels constructed to be used as dining rooms.
- Marquee erected to be used as the Dhamma 'Hall'.
- Caravan used as a food preparation zone, located near the entrance.
- Porta loos located on site.
- All student accommodation was camping.
- Ablution blocks were re-sited to their present location but yet to be connected to the septic
- Domestic septic installed for ablution blocks and made serviceable.
- First building - the Dhamma Hall.
- Second building - Kitchen / Office / Servers accommodation, as presently still used.
- Marquee moved to Female side as accommodation and lined with blue insulation batts on roof and walls.
- Two caravans (one on each side of the compound) plus a bus that could be used for either male or female accommodation.
- Building accommodation blocks. The first constructed on the female side of the compound with six single rooms followed by the same on the male side.
- Building of second accommodation blocks concurrently on both male and female side.
- Construction of dining room facility
- Female assistant teacher's residence constructed
- Female servers' accommodation (pre-fabricated structure) installed and verandah added
- Four tent-site shelters constructed
- Major upgrade of septic and drainage system undertaken
- Interview room and entranceways to Dhamma Hall constructed
- Office extended onto verandah space to create separate female server dining.
- Verandah enclosed on dining rooms as food serving area.
- Installation of air conditioning in the Dhamma Hall
- New server accommodation footings in-situ

Proposed works

The Centre has received planning approval for a four-staged development:

- Stage 1 includes two new server accommodation units, each containing two single rooms. This stage has received approval for building and construction commenced on 21st November 2022.
- Stage 2 includes two student ablutions blocks (one for each side of the meditation campus), each containing four bathrooms. Construction will begin early 2023.
- Stage 3 is an extension of the meditation hall, with construction to begin late 2023.
- Stage 4 includes 16 meditation huts (eight on each side of the meditation campus). Construction will begin incrementally mid-to-late 2023.

Stage 2 ablutions blocks will eventually form part of student ensuite accommodation.