

May 13th, 2024 Dark Retreat Cabin Visit - Assessment Notes

[View images of the Dark Retreat Cabin>>](#)

On Monday 13, 2024 six people from the Tsegyalgar East community met with Joe Zurylo outside of the dark retreat cabin that is situated on Joe and Kathy's land, in Conway, MA.

Tucked in between the trees is the building app. 15'x24' with two stories. Downstairs is a hallway, a kitchen area, a toilet, and a storage area with a wood stove, in addition to originally two retreat rooms, now converted into one light retreat room with a screened in small porch. The staircase is centered in the building and upstairs are two small dark retreat rooms, each app. 6'x7', on each side of the hallway. So a total of 5 retreat rooms.

Regarding the condition, the cabin appears to be structurally sound. However, the building, not having been utilized for some time, shows signs of critters, the air ducts appear to be inhabited with a small pile of some sort of waste product inside. There is dampness in the air (though no apparent rot or mold) with a strong smell, although the cabin has electricity with a lightbulb in the hallway on each floor, and each retreat room has a small electric heater, it has been closed up and unheated for some time.

It would take weeks of airing, after extensive cleaning and work on the ducts and finding the entrances the rodents use. Since this has been done a few times over the years, there is no promise it would not be a yearly task. The mattresses appear to be okay but we did not turn them.

The room with the porch, downstairs, could be more useful than the dark retreat rooms upstairs. It was suggested that we may not need a dark retreat cabin that can hold several people at once, that the four upstairs rooms could be downsized to two.

These issues would need to be addressed, as every little aspect may become amplified when doing a dark retreat. A strong smell can be disturbing, likewise any movement in the walls etc, can be truly disturbing, and so on.

However the work and investment needed to bring this cabin up to a respectable standard today, could be considerable. Not impossible, but increasingly difficult for us as aging caretakers and practitioners. Then there is the aspect of investing in a property on someone's private land. It could mean a lot of disturbing traffic both for renovation and afterwards for its use. If it were on community property, access and use could be - potentially - more frequent. It needs year-round attention to be usable. It could be part of the community's routine maintenance tasks to air it and report on its condition.

We also need to consider easier access in providing service to dark retreatants. The process of filling the water tank for the flushable toilet and kitchen sink is an additional challenge.

If there is consensus for establishing a dark retreat facility in our community today, it may be more logical to be situated on our own land of lower Khandroling. Having electricity is a big asset. It means it can be heated all year round, and an electric toilet like a Cinderella, can be installed. Properly insulated and critter free would be essential. How many people would use it is an open question, and likewise the additional fee necessary to cover the expenses.

Since Dark Retreat is one of the practices Rinpoche transmitted here, and one which is referred to in Dream Yoga practice, and practices related to dying, which are actively being taught, it seems we ought to have such a cabin. If it were on lower Khandroling, easy to use, it would be ideal. It means it can be heated all year round, and an electric toilet like a Cinderella, can be installed. Properly insulated and critter free would be essential.

If the farmhouse could be available for use to service the cabin- cook food, boil water- it would be wonderful. Perhaps a small extension could be added to the farm house as a cabin attendant's room for those tasks or near to the new cabin.

There was a suggestion to buy a ready-made shed, and insulate it to use as a one-person dark retreat cabin.

If we build or put in place a new cabin, it would be good if people familiar with the practice could be involved in design. Air exchange is very important, as are the absences of toxic or other smells, sound, light, damp, fear of intrusion, and the need for a toilet and an attendant for safety and food.

Very importantly, none of this negates the importance of the cabin we have had, and used, the years of practice done there. Without that cabin, Rinpoche would not have given all that he gave here, year after year, would not have practiced here, Yeshe would not have done a dark retreat here, and so many others would not have had practice experiences and understandings. Joe and Kathy's generosity and sacrifice and tolerance and work will not be negated nor should they be forgotten by a change of location for this retreat cabin, working with the circumstances.

We are in awe and thankful, once again, with all the work, investment and sweat our community has put into buildings and projects since Rinpoche first came to this area more than 40 years ago.

Notes from Dr. Phuntsog about treasure vase:

Ellen 5/29/2024

"I had a chance to talk with Phuntsog about our treasure vase question yesterday. She said it's not ideal to move it, but if circumstances make it necessary, we can do it. We need to do a practice like Sang and Serkyem when we dig it up. Then we should look for an auspicious day to bury it in the new place, doing another Sang and Serkyem at that time."