

On Retreat - a Journal of a 28 Day Meditation Retreat at the Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre, Bundanoon.

3/1/06, ??AM

The first day of the 28. I am not sure how this typing is going to go, or whether it is in breach of "noble silence" (the rule of silence on Buddhist retreats). It does not seem very noisy. I also don't know if it will be a distraction to me. I don't think it has to be, if done with awareness, done without causing "wobbling", to quote Patrick from last night (when walking, walk, when sitting, sit, don't wobble).

So far, so good. A bit of social unease meeting Patrick, a bit of overcompensation chatting to some lads from the staff, but not without awareness in either case. I have been here before and am able to notice some characteristic distractions more quickly. I hope to be braver about doing what is appropriate for me without worrying so much about what others might think. I certainly don't claim indifference, just more awareness of the anxieties which cuts them off quicker.



The Meditation Hall

3/1/06 1:19 PM

The impulse to overdo it comes from, or manifests, both gaining mind and mind that grasps for the future. Mistake to think today and the next few days will be easy just because the meditation periods are 45 minutes rather than an hour. I got up at 4.30, therefore have been going for nearly 9 hours and have as much again to go before the end of the schedule. Exceeding the schedule would certainly be a foolish ambition, adhering to it rigidly only slightly less so. I am beginning to

feel tired and may need to sleep this afternoon. No need for that to be judged a defeat.

Patrick has emphasised the body, commending awareness of the body to us, suggesting that enlightenment may be known in or through the body, beginning the day with exercises. My own body a contest of tensions. The feeling that the deck of the meditation hall was swaying – and the earth too, briefly. It wasn't that I felt unsteady – I was doing a good job of walking the swaying deck.

3/1/06 7:13 PM

A sore back seems likely, and I half regret giving Jake my brace, but only half, as it didn't do me much good last time. Near the end of the first day. A certain amount of calm, and, I suppose, better than no insight at all. Judging mind says "a flat day", but I also remember what a Tibetan teacher said about boredom as an opportunity. Not entirely into it yet. The doubts are much as usual, perhaps diminished a little because I am staying a month.

4/1/06 7:46 AM

Rain overnight – welcome as ever in this dry continent and relatively well-watered place. Rising at 4.30 to do an early sitting session, with a few others. The competitive impulse is toning down, perhaps to something useful. Nothing wrong with honest emulation, as long as it takes account of one's own state of being and arises from respect for the others.

Patrick in last night's dhamma talk on what is real – one answer, what is present, what survives mindfulness. And on emotion as the juice in fantasies – emotion is always present – strong emotion makes it harder to pull out of fantasies. On habit (not distraction) as what keeps us deluded – distraction as opportunity, when we become conscious that we have been distracted we are present. And how we discover the absence of the illusory self by becoming mindful of its stratagems (present to its stratagems). One of my intentions in this retreat is to watch distractions arising and see more clearly what they are doing for me. Protecting, defending, certainly I can see from a distance and will look out for close up.

Mindfulness/awareness as the object of awareness - a hint of that this morning when I retreated a little from the breath, attempted to untangle the mixture of attention and a futile impulse to control with which I approach the breath.

4/1/06 1:06 PM

A soft rain has been falling all day. Good for walking meditation, said Patrick, not, I believe, ironically. My state of mind certainly congruous with the rain, perhaps affected by it: gentle, a little bit abstracted, not exactly unfocussed but content with vacancy as an alternative to the meditation object. Overall, more calm than insight the last couple of days.

The other people. I am certainly aware of them and some stories are appearing but so far without the intensity of other retreats. The American woman, the pregnant girl, the nerdy girl, the black haired girl who walks fast, the girl with the tattoo between her shoulder blades, the wild man, Alec from January, the sportsman, the tall hippy teacher with John Lennon glasses. Plenty of stories but so far they don't have much grip on me - requiring only to be noticed briefly, a rueful or delighted smile sufficient response.

Detox already happening here and feeling good. No alcohol, not much coffee, vegetarian food, wholesome thoughts. When I get home I do seem to go to the other extreme. The weight thing is just the visible sign. I wonder how much, if any, I will lose. Need to work something out with Linda - various undercurrents there - she loves to feed me up and I love it too, a bit too much.

Missing Linda: two dimensions - missing her, and concerned about her missing me - none of my business, of course, a response to be watched, but maybe not entirely discounted. We choose to love and be loved and that carries responsibilities.

Not sure if all this record keeping is a problem. Maybe restrict it. Although that would mean missing things - multiple daily entries a better way to catch small insights.



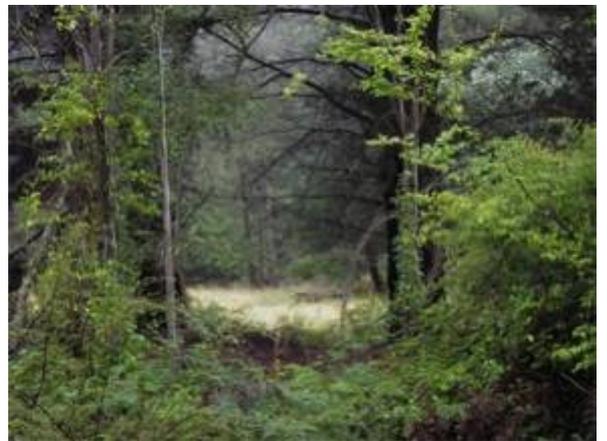
Shoes were on and off a lot

4/1/06 7:23 PM

And multiple daily entries it will probably be, unless I put away the machine. Less pain in the legs, because I am alternating my bench and cushion with my chair, means less effort, less intensity, and perhaps excludes the "breakthrough after 50 minutes" style of sitting I remember from previous retreats. Which is also, of course, excluded by the sits being 45 minutes, at least officially. I am feeling that 45 minutes is too short, while not free of aversion to the soreness the extra time will bring.

Sati - mindfulness - and another Pali phrase, meaning intelligent reflection, joining the dots as Patrick put it. Good to have reinforcement that the reflection is appropriate. I have an unskilful meditation habit of mind which says that all thought is inappropriate. And perhaps it justifies these notes as well.

Rehearsed conversations with Patrick, and other self-justifying monologues, are certainly still with me, but seem to have less grip. So far, at least.



It was a green place, with vistas

5/1/06 7:39 AM

The morning of the third day. 25 to go. Ha! What of it? Various things, nothing much. If it weren't for Linda I would be almost perfectly happy to be here for a month. There would also be some cravings for Tuross.

Patrick's dhamma talk last night, about the opening, summary, of the sattipathana sutra. A good framework. Nibbana as a fire going out. Meditation and how we live fundamentally the same. Conflict between understanding and actions for most of us. Nibbana wellbeing with no practical application. Puna - merit - not needed in Nibbana. The craving mind - tanya. Non-fashioning, unconstructedness, what is ok just as it is. Nibbana what survives presence. Distraction as forgetting, mindfulness as remembering. Remembering to be present, and what we remember (the elements of experience). "Surrendering desire and grief for the world" - not pursuing our emotional entanglements.

A different process this time, more systematic. Taking notes, reviewing them, writing up the experience. Not in contradiction with doing it. "Clear understanding", sampa-jariya, stepping back and monitoring.

5/1/06 1:04 PM

Nothing prepared for my interview, which is in contrast with previous retreats. A few things have come to mind. The lack of anxiety shouldn't be an excuse for discourtesy to Patrick. Actually, I am quite tense, about the interview, in the usual way. The difference is that it has cut in later, after lunch for a 3pm interview rather than yesterday afternoon.

The practice talk this morning: perceiving the elements. He also talked about this last year, but this time he gives less emphasis to earth, water fire and air - he mentions them then skips straight to the translations, hard/soft, wet/dry, hot/cold and movement/support (this last, air, is the one I find hardest to grasp). I was resistant to any talk of elements, probably because Steven Smith had said it wasn't necessary, but Patrick won me round by using the translations rather than asking us to identify the traditional elements and talking about their value in supporting detailed awareness. It seems appropriate to follow the teacher as far as possible on any retreat - analogies perhaps with the conductor of an orchestra - you might not agree with his tempo, but making up your own or following a different conductor would not be the best response - or, that not being a great analogy, you might say that a

teacher offers a structure which includes elements of theory and practice which are mutually supportive and adapted to the capacities of her students.

5/1/06 7:21 PM

Two long (for me) sits this afternoon, 1hr 10 on the bench and 1hr 30 on the chair. The proximate cause the time taken out by my interview, but of course that could have been handled any number of ways. Probably I should just trust myself to have done the right thing. It was tiring to sit so long. I tried the new technique that Patrick suggested and will persist with it, initially as my chosen primary object, and then later as a back up when the breath isn't working. We have three more days of this schedule, and then we have to discover our own rhythm. I have already started to do that but it could do with tuning up (to mix musical metaphors).



Shadow picture

6/1/06 7:41 AM

The morning of the fourth full day. Following Patrick's advice to do the "sitting touching" meditation has revealed how much unsatisfactoriness there is around my body. Aches and pains, unbalance, tension, a clenched stomach. And how I have been using meditation on the breath to ignore it. There seems to be a specific pain associated with this meditation, at the top of the spine and the back of the neck, that I speculate is a kind of referred pain from all the others, a standard-bearer for them which says put your attention somewhere else then I will go away.

Nor have the breath itself, and my problems with it, gone away - being part of the body, of course. I often notice that I am deliberately breathing. Perhaps bracing against the pain. Also a particular out of

breath feeling when I concentrate on something (anything). A tightness in the upper chest that feels like a failure of the breathing muscles. Towards the end of the last sitting I sat with the tightness and watched it pass away. All this, of course, links with my experience of the exercise class, lots of little aches and pains there. And with the walking meditation too, in ways which right now I only vaguely intuit.

6/1/06 12:51 PM

Carry on. Just do this. Note the questions and hesitations. Note the dissolution of what would have been my stated motives, and their replacement by others, based on the actual difficulties and rewards. Morale changes. I feel differently about things from week to week, day to day, moment to moment. My constructed world changes, and not in small ways.

Lunchtime would be the time to take some pictures. Why not, after all. I guess I should ask Patrick. Right now, however, I feel like a rest.



The ferns thrived on the wet weather

7/1/06 7:39 AM

Thunderstorms yesterday evening, intermittent rain through the night, a damp cold morning which resulted in the heaters being turned on in the meditation hall this morning. I like the exercises, like how they energise me, but they do also hurt my back, and I have great difficulties with those requiring me to sit on the ground and bend from the waist. This leads to internal narratives about how Patrick shouldn't be doing such dangerous exercises. He will be doing so once more, tomorrow morning, and after that I will need to find my own way of exercising.

This room probably is big enough.

Glimpses of how I create and defend a false self. Certainly that is what I am doing in and through the internal narratives. Asserting my importance and quality, defending myself against attacks that might arise if I expressed my feelings which I fear, or think might attract blame if I expressed them.

Glimpses of when and how I control my breathing. To make it visible when it is subtle and I am trying to follow it in meditation. To suppress discomfort. By regularising the breathing. By "taking over" following a breath to ensure the next one follows. The tension in the upper chest is perhaps because taking over suppresses the natural process.

I should get a practice of sitting in this chair. It feels nice.

7/1/06 12:58 PM

A bit of a flat day, with the flavour of waiting inattentively for something to happen, realising that I was doing that, and trying to pay a bit more attention but not really having a lot of energy. Or, put otherwise, nothing much happening, and my reactions to that not immediately identified as the object of meditation. Actually, hours happened, as they will, in which I was intermittently present.

Also quite a bit of looking forward to the end of the retreat and thinking about my life outside.

In sitting meditation, I continued to meditate with sitting/touching, the breath, and my impulses to control the breath. With sitting/touching, I began to gain a little bit of fluency with the practice rather than spending a lot of time wondering where to go next with my attention. With the breath, I both started with it and came to it as a result of observing movement or sensation at the nostrils. I attempted to look at it both at the nostrils and at the abdomen, depending on what came to notice, without telling myself that I had to eternally decide which to do, and was able to follow it without imposing control for short periods but at other times the controlling impulse was strong. In relation to

controlling the breath, [see above](#).

A question about the breath: the disjunction between what I see if I look at my belly (regular rising and falling) and what I perceive at the nostrils or belly at the same time (confusion, irregular rhythms).

In walking meditation worked on shifting the attention from foot to foot and on noting intent, both to make specific movements and continuous intent. I also did a walking meditation in which I walked fast and made my aches and pains the primary object. The exercise endorphins cut in and the pains became pleasurable. Marijuana has a similar effect - a thought I did not share with Patrick.

Missing Linda today, and the boys. Thinking what they would be doing on a Saturday, wanting to be with them. And thinking about Fortrose, my mother, people there. Missing them too. And thinking about Jake. What more I could do for him? I guess see him, spend time with him. He must be lonely and would probably like that.

Ah, the self. I need to pay more attention to the whole thing with the teacher. It is about the false self. Me, proving myself worthy to my chosen authority, wanting to be validated in my self-image. And I know there is nothing to prove, and no-one about whom it might be proved. But I do go on with it. Time to take the opportunity which it provides.

7/1/06 7:30 PM

Useful in my interview today the idea that effort, straining, is always misplaced. Perceiving in more detail is a matter of aiming the attention, a skill which improves with practice, not making more effort at the time. The effort one can make is the interior manifestation of one's available energy which can't be racked up by straining. Follow up question for tomorrow about whether one can do anything more generally to increase energy - eg in the face of sleepiness.

Mood improving over the last hour. Prickliness, hostility to other students, slightly abating. Impermanence and not-self. I am not my mood, my mood is not mine (in that I can't control it). And from Patrick's

teaching on not self last night, the notion of the self that the Buddha refuted was of something owned and controlled. Sidestepping the objection that "of course there is there self". Indeed so. He said what replaces the false self is a lighter self, less tied, more open and free. I can certainly see, in and for myself, what he means by the false self. If only I weren't so very attached to my self, so intricately involved.



Garden flowers ran wild everywhere

8/1/06 7:41 AM

Idea for a graphic, perhaps for Tricycle: students waiting for the toast to pop up. Serried ranks of meditators. Never been sure what "serried" means. The dictionary tells me that it means "crowded together with little space between each". Perhaps before a huge golden toaster, echoing the golden Buddhas. Or a small golden toaster, in a corner. Might be able to get suitable images from Google Image.

Not so far this morning from just doing it, noting everything that comes up including the self-judgements and the self-creating narratives. Reassuring in thinking about the three weeks to go. All a continuous now, and now has its moments.

8/1/06 1:24 PM

Is it that time already? Yes, of course it is, lunch started 15 minutes late and I didn't gobble my food. New cooks today, a different approach, less sophisticated but still satisfying.

Talking to Linda this morning was good. She sounded a bit emotionally wobbly, husky from a sore throat, and missing me a lot, she said. I should never have left her hanging over whether or not I would ring. Of course she was complicit in my doing so in that when I raised the

possibility of ringing she sternly stated that she thought I should go for it, which I took as code for don't ring. But I am the one who knows about this business, and has to decide what I should and should not do. Of course after ringing I thought about her, it changed the content of my mind stream. But it didn't change the nature of the mind stream - there had been plenty of thoughts, including some about her and others much less pleasant, before I called her, and even if it had changed its nature, that would have just been more raw material for awareness.

I think she was more deeply hurt by Alan leaving her than she had said or I had understood, and has been slower to recover. She has talked about being vulnerable to meltdown and I have seen her when it all gets too much. Perhaps that is part of the same story. I find myself glad and grateful that she cares about me and wanting to be good to her and for her.

Issues for today's interview with Patrick:

- < thanks for the helpful advice about not straining
- < working with the mindstream - any advice?
- < walking meditation - which is when my mindstream appears - go detailed, or back off, if I want to look at the mindstream
- < in sitting meditation, feeling, when meditating on the breath and it is going ok that if I were meditating on the body, there would be a lot more useful suffering to work with

Oh dear. Talking to myself (out loud, I mean, not on the keyboard). A sign of ease and comfort with me, but to be avoided around here.

Patrick's talk about cultivating generosity last night, and what he called "the economy of gift". At first I thought he was giving us his own ideas but it became clear he was summarising classic doctrine, as he always does. Interesting and to me, challenging, as I am far from generous naturally. A rather dry treatment of the subject, but that is his way (and softened as always by his warmth and humour). Nor is he vulnerable to any accusation of conflict of interest. There is certainly the appearance of such a conflict, in that he stands to benefit from the application of his teachings in this area. However, I don't believe there is any actual

conflict or that what he says has been distorted by concern for his own interest. He would follow what he saw as the truth to his private disadvantage without a moment's hesitation.

8/1/06 3:41 PM

Patrick's answer on working with the mindstream. Look for the arising of the thought, and look for its energy quality, ignoring content and even emotion. In walking meditation, make an undertaking to notice thought as it arises for the length of the path. Then just walk. At the end, turn, renew the undertaking ("addidana" or some such), and walk again. It occurred to me while drinking my soup that I make it hard for myself to ignore the content by expressing it well, in well-turned phrases. In fact, I do some of my best work deceiving myself and constructing a false self whose construction and defence consumes vast amounts of psychic energy.



I loved this old man tree on one of the paths

8/1/06 7:22 PM

Patrick's advice on posture, which he has repeated and I have cheerfully ignored, might, if followed, alter my state of mind. Certainly being hunched happens at the same time as wild internal monologues and psychodramas about my vindication (while my foes receive their just deserts - usually a good dose of public humiliation). He is suggesting a causal connection. I have tested this by maintaining something like his recommended posture while doing walking meditation and eating supper. While the dramas hadn't disappeared, they had lost a lot of their juice. I wondered for a moment if this weren't just addressing the symptoms, before realising that if the symptoms disappear, I will have no further concerns. I have always been sceptical about eastern theories of energy, but really, it would be unlikely that so many sensitive and cultivated people were all just imagining something. One

doesn't have to buy the metaphysics to accept that the techniques make a difference.

A thought from last night's dharma talk (my thought, at a time when I was resisting the argument). Could I improve my drawing by spending a full day doing it - carrying around a pad and pencils and just drawing, dawn to dusk. Nice idea - might be very hard to sustain though.

A little tired tonight. Maybe to bed after the dharma talk rather than sitting on with all the good students. Hmm. And what is more, lay awake waiting for them to come to bed to see how much better students they were than me, measured in minutes. But of course also made allowances for the fact that I might have started earlier in the morning than them. I haven't put too much of the detail of my construction of an imagined self as "great meditator and misunderstood hero" into these notes. I was going to say "shameful detail", but of course finding it shameful is part of the whole story, as is finding it shameful to find it shameful. Ignore the content and just look at the energies, Patrick says, and I have an inkling of what he means.

9/1/06 7:51 AM

The first morning of the second week. Patrick's day off, so no interviews or dharma talk. And a new schedule, which has no exercise period or practice talk or designation of periods for sitting and walking. Just large (around 4 hour) blocks of time called "practice period" in which you sit or walk as you choose. A lot of freedom, and it may liberate me from my obsession with clock watching and doing the right thing. I have started the day not carrying a watch, intending to go with my feelings within the structure provided by meal bells and a beeper on the hour in the meditation hall. So far, so good.

This morning paying attention to posture and associated feelings in the body (tensions, constrictions), and to the stream of thoughts, and to how they play against each other. Also to "citta", mind/heart, where the Buddha's image of the untrained citta as a fish flapping on land described my own condition at one moment when I noticed it and no doubt often enough when I didn't.

Time to go walking. It is cold, again.

9/1/06 1:03 PM

It is forecast to rain all week, says Chris, the Manager, in a note outside the meditation hall. But after that, two weeks remain in which it could well become unpleasantly hot. I don't much mind the rain. I have my umbrella, my Gore-Tex and my solid shoes. The mist is beautiful in the tall old pines and the raindrops on the leaves in the gardens.

The unstructured morning passed much as the structured ones had, doing one thing, then another. Only three things this morning, exercise and sitting and walking, no practice talk as Patrick was away. The exercise done in my room which was fine and I was able to soften the stuff that hurts my back and introduce a few of my own stretches. Daily exercise is one of the things it would be good to maintain after the retreat. After last January I did continue with it for most of the year, so I might again.

What to say about my meditation this morning? That I brought to it more concentration than mindfulness. Stuck reasonably well with the primary objects, but didn't notice a whole lot else. The best of it was a few moments when I stopped focussing on one thing (breathing or walking) and notice a number of things, simultaneously or one after another, without snatching any of them or pushing any away. I like the feeling of things being in their place and no personal agenda from me to interfere with them. Also a glimpse or two of how particular thoughts were conditioned, by someone seen or something heard. The continuing narrative of "myself as meditator" produced vague intimations of disappointment which I mostly let through to the keeper.

After lunch, I ran into my sense of humour. Good to find it still alive. Patrick's humour is engaging. Most teachers seem to enjoy a joke. I wonder if the Buddha told jokes.

Glimpses of other meditators. The pregnant girl gently stroking her tummy. The impeccable Burmese lady taking tiny slow steps. The grin on the face of a meditator with whom I did a small dance of who-goes-first at the dining room door and the delighted smile of another listening to Patrick's tale of Anagarika Munindra giving him an enthusiastic but somewhat uninformative answer to the question "what is mindfulness?". The grace of slow walking, and fast walking, done mindfully. The quick

flick of eye meeting eye for an abstract moment.



A view between tree trunks

9/1/06 7:34 PM

No dharma talk tonight. What to do? Probably read one by Joseph Goldstein, then meditate, maybe not too late. I am not yet tired, and don't have need or impulse to take time off. I practised "just walking, just sitting" this afternoon, through a bit of confusion and a flat mood. May as well carry on with that.

10/1/06 7:45 AM

Another misty morning, still, parrots falling horizontally in the high tops of the trees as they do with their wings folded back.

The innocent turds of vegetarians (any more would be too much information).

The process of the, or of my, meditation retreat really does come down to just doing one thing after another, sleeping, rising, sitting, exercise, breakfast, shit, walk. Doing all that while attending to a "primary meditation object" (the body, breath, walking) and to whatever else comes up. What often comes up is a stream of mental commentary about myself as meditator. Sometimes I am right in there with the commentary, increasingly often it is just going on of its own accord with various sticky points at which "I" am attached to it, manifesting in emotions, bodily tensions, changes in breathing. It is interesting to notice what gets it going at particular moments (a person, a sound, a difficulty of some kind). Various other things come up too, but the story is much the same.

10/1/06 1:03 PM

Hot, sunny, humid. But more rain possible. What questions will I produce for teacher's approval this afternoon? I don't seem to have a lot. The new schedule has been good. Something about postural adjustments. Something about meditating in my room. Something about sitting meditation, meditating on the breath, gaps in the breath, soreness in the chest and how they might be connected to my essential reactivity, the way I deal with experience and respond. In essence that controlling my breath and making up self-vindicating stories might point to the same kind of defensive response. And Patrick's observation that meditation on the citta (heart/mind) raises ethical questions about appropriate response, because it is the citta that responds. And a question about pranayama, I think it is called, meditates in which the breath is deliberately controlled for a particular purpose.

10/1/06 7:21 PM

It is now painfully clear that my paradigm for enlightenment has been:

1. Obey the rules.
2. Get good marks in the meditation exam.
3. Conceal my true nature from the authorities.

All unsurprising characteristics in a boarding school boy. However, perhaps there is hope. As noted [above](#), Patrick had previously said to all of us that it was up to us to decide how and when we meditate, that this is a free form retreat, but perhaps I thought he was out to trick the unwary into giving themselves away, because I found it liberating to hear him say the same thing in my interview, in response to a question about meditating in my room. I promptly went for a brisk walk in the bush and sat for an hour in my room. Both were rewarding. For my next offences I will probably take, and edit, a few photographs. However, I will continue to put in the hours on feet and bum, as long as I remain on the track of anything interesting.

10/1/06 10:25 PM

"From where I see things" (i.e. me, myself, I) is just another phenomenon, arising and passing away. I know, I know. But I identify

with it, usually, in practice (pun intended, or at least noted and retained).

11/1/06 7:43 AM

This morning it seems there is a lot to be done and that can be done, not without difficulties but the intention does not seem futile. Looking for my underlying condition of mind at any moment, the quality or quiddity of seeing and responding. And what happens when a bird with a repetitive song is performing while I am doing walking meditation. Also, tidy my room, especially if I am to use it for meditation. Allons y.

And so it went, not quite as planned, but not too far away either.

11/1/06 1:05 PM

Greed observed over lunch. Arriving late, I found only a small amount of the curries left. This resulted in my taking less than I normally would and, recognising that I might not be the last, ensuring I left some. However two other people did arrive, and as it turned out, I had taken more than my share of what was left when I arrived. Reflecting on the incident, I concluded that I could not claim to be pure, as a desire to minimise the injustice to myself resulting from there being not enough to take my normal portion reduced the provision I was willing to make for latecomers.

Oh dear. Several times in the meditation hall over the last week I smelled an unpleasant odour and complacently reflected that I had not produced it. But this morning, meditating all alone in my closed room, an unpleasant odour that I had no recollection of producingÉ.

I have wanted the course to be over and to be going home, and have had vague thoughts of leaving early, from the first day, and this will continue until it ends (17 days to go and there is no doubt who is counting). Certainly some good things to go back to - Linda, my children, photography, cooking, cycling, gardening, Tuross. But I am also missing my usual pattern of delusions and bad habits and evasions, despite clearly seeing how they make me unhappy, in a low key way, but inexorably. I have mostly pushed this feeling aside so far but will no doubt have plenty of opportunities to take a closer look.



These were everywhere, in and out of the gardens

It is interesting how the dharma talk shapes the next day's meditation. Last night Patrick talked about the "hindrances" - the classical obstacles to insight. Sensual desire, malice and anger, stiffness and torpor, restlessness of mind and obsessive doubt. This morning I have had most of a Cook's Tour. A pair of vivid sexual fantasies lie in wait. I haven't succumbed to either of them, yet. I won't spell out what I mean by "succumbed". Small doses of malice, towards other meditators. Torpor and restlessness alternating on a walking meditation. No "paralytic doubt", yet.

This and any meditation practice is a shaped experience in which the tradition and the individual teacher provide a road map and advice on how to deal with the hazards of the journey and their credibility is established when the road conforms to the map and the advice proves to be sound. The hindrances were certainly there before last night. If Patrick had talked about them on the first night, I would no doubt have spotted some the next day. I could suspect that I am experiencing things because I am supposed to, that the whole thing is a kind of structured collective fantasy. I don't actually think that, but I am interested in how different traditions tell apparently very different stories which are all validated through the experience of practitioners. Is there some common core? Are there different recipes for Nibbana? Do spiritual roads ascend different mountains? Or is there some other frame of reference entirely?

11/1/06 7:11 PM

A classic blue mountains thunderstorm to end a day that was very warm, and we are under the heavy rain. The stone paths have turned to streams and the mulch has been washed out from under the bushes onto the grassy slope. Everyone is scampering about under umbrellas, vainly trying to keep their feet dry. I just took a photograph - my first -

of the view from my window. The view is better from the rooms on the other side of the building, facing south east down the hill to the rows of big pine trees in the garden and beyond, but they were all taken when I arrived.

The umbrellas are a theme for one of my internal narratives. Some are privately owned, some public, left behind by previous meditators. Having brought my own, I use it all the time, imagine being accused of being an umbrella hog, and also feel animosity towards anyone who, thinking it is a public umbrella, takes the liberty of using it. I know, I know - seriously ridiculous. Now it is not raining so hard so people are back to walking slowly under their (public or private) umbrellas, picking their way down the sodden slope outside my window.

A shift in my perspective on meditation sessions which I might previously described as dull or flat, as I have an inkling of how to go about looking at what lies behind any such judgement.

11/1/06 10:12 PM

Another interesting dhamma talk from Patrick, defending vipassana against some serenity meditation heretics in his audience. For myself, I am not sure if I have much choice, as I don't see myself ever accumulating much serenity without dismantling some of my emotional habits and delusions.

12/1/06 7:38 AM

Some aversion this morning, anger, the colour of my mind. It began early - my early morning meditation was quite painful, sore knees and back, and I detected aversion then, which might have carried over into breakfast to be restimulated by the proximity of my fellow meditators. It manifests in thoughts about what I am doing here and an impulse to throw myself into the next walking meditation with numb belligerence. And seeing this disposition as just another phenomenon which arises and passes away and is essentially empty is difficult because it does very strongly confirm the self - I am angry, therefore I am.

12/1/06 1:08 PM

The aversion which I mentioned in the previous entry continued throughout the morning and accompanied a confused and restless state of mind. I have left my glasses in the meditation room, making it hard to see what I am writing. Solution, of course: increase the size of the font. I leave things all over the meditation hall and grounds - hats, shoes, socks, clothing, notebook, umbrella, insect repellent. Others seem less given to scattering their possessions.

A long sit (for me) this morning, 90-100 minutes. Sore legs at the end, but not impossibly so. Why did I quit when I did instead of waiting 5 minutes longer for the lunch bell? I don't know, and why I end shorter sits is also a mystery. It seems to just happen, which calls for a closer look. It did occur to me towards the end that I was continuing in the face of pain in order to pass my meditation exam ([see above](#)) which undermined one reason for continuing. The other, better reason would be to keep on looking at how my mind was working under the pressure of sore legs and lust for lunch.

I decided after struggling through a plate of porridge, prunes, muesli, yoghurt and fruit (my standard breakfast) that I need to reduce the size of my portions if I am to lose as much weight as I would like to. Yet I am almost sure that it was a smaller plate than I would have comfortably eaten the day I arrived. My lunchtime portion was larger than the modest plateful I imagined when making my good resolution but also, I suspect, smaller than it would have been a week ago.

Feeling dozy, post-lunch. Time for a walk in the bush Éwhich was lovely. I walked more slowly than usual, and took some pictures.



Whatever you think it is

12/1/06 7:14 PM

Pleasant feelings this afternoon and evening, moments of sustained concentration and escape from time and expectation. Enough said.

13/1/06 7:39 AM

A reduced portion at breakfast was fine. I was preoccupied with trying to catch thoughts as they arise, which is my most common activity when meditating. My usual irritation when I notice that I have drifted or plunged off into a thought has been replaced by a brisk determination to notice it as it happens the next time. That has been difficult but not impossible. Being silently close to so many people at meals produces torrents of thought in my mind, so it is a productive time to look for it arising. I don't often manage this - usually I am in the thick of it before I notice, and miss the moment of transition.

I am feeling very drowsy as I sit here typing - a tiredness originating in the mind or the body? I did sit later than usual last night, waiting for the 10pm beeper in the meditation hall, which did not come. When I eventually decided that enough was enough and left the hall, it was 10.40. The beeper makes a tiny sound not dissimilar to an insect's chirp, but it is not usually hard to notice in the silence of the meditation hall so I don't know how I managed to miss it. I think the tiredness comes from my mind and has spread to my body. I will do a walking meditation to start off the day.

13/1/06 1:06 PM

The tiredness did prove to be mental, dissipating in 20 minutes of brisk walking. The rest of the morning was spent trying to sort out aches and pains and postural imbalances while following the breath in sitting meditation, sometimes watching myself watching the breath rather than (or as well as) directly watching it. A state of balance and clarity sometimes approached but never stayed long. I may have driven it away by grabbing for it.

In walking meditation, I noticed, occasionally, my habit of making up some kind of marching song and paying attention to it rather than my actual steps. A rhythm imposed on the steps that draws on the sound my feet make when they hit the ground or on the peaks and troughs of pressure and movement. It is usually also a pattern of closer and more distant attention to the actual sensations in my legs and feet. Sometimes the rhythm keys to my breath, and sometimes to the

repetitive song of a bird. The koel has such a song, a rather irritating one, and when the black cockatoos are feeding on pine cones near by one of them makes a softer shirring sound that always entwines itself with my walking.

13/1/06 7:26 PM

Twenty minutes of "free time" (hah!) after supper and before the dhamma talk. Sucking on a barley sugar provides a non-specific memory of childhood. The taste of a plum the other day brought, as it often does, a much more specific memory. Mowing the lawn at Platcock, the big house above the village, for which I was paid half a crown by its owner, "Uncle Chum". Colonel Cholmondeley Torin was his full name and his family were friends of my mother's family : his wife "Aunt Kath", a kind and formidable matriarch, had befriended my grandmother when she moved north with three teenage daughters soon after the second world war. There were three Torin daughters roughly of an age with my mother and her sisters and the Torins introduced the new family into local society. The youngest Torin girl, Priscilla, has come back to live in the village after a life in other places, as have my mother and her sisters, and they are all still close friends. Priscilla calls or visits my mother most days, always quick with a good humoured insult which is returned in good measure.

"Uncle Chum" was a large, bony, white haired man with, I think, a "gammy leg" and a monocle, who was generous with half-crowns, for which he exacted payment not only in garden work: he had the also habit of delivering a tremendous pinch to the ear or cheek. I think it was the ear or cheek. I can't exactly remember which part of the anatomy. It couldn't have been the balls.

1/14/06 7:39 AM

"Proustian moments" are common on meditation retreats. One is encouraged to note them and let them pass. Elaborating on them to the extent of a multi-volume novel would certainly be reprovved and even the previous paragraphs would probably be counselled against.

Even when it is going badly (i.e., not to expectation), meditation can be going fine, if one then turns the attention to the expectation itself and how its failure is working out in body and mind. And this form of utility, this opportunity, is virtually ensured because expectations are created -

of calm, stillness, clarity etc - when those states of mind are talked about and when they are experienced. Presence is what is called for, at whatever price. My first last session yesterday and first two this morning were frustrating, butÉ in this way.

I am beginning to see thoughts as explosions of energy in the way Patrick suggested. Suddenly the water boils and steam comes off. Energy in the body is like the boiling water, the thoughts like the steam. It is an apt metaphor for what happens in my mind when I am feeling tense.

14/1/06 1:11 PM

I am getting the hang of it in theory but practice lags behind. In order to end up with a "small portion" you need to take helpings of each of its components that seem too small to sustain life. I am reducing the size of my components, yes, but the final result still seems larger than I intended, and by then it's too late to put any back - you would have to go through the food queue again which would look very odd.

Tomorrow is the last day of the retreat for people who are doing two weeks, and the half way point for those of us who are here for four weeks. I had some ideas about who might be going and staying, and will be able to check them out over the rest of today as people who are staying put their names up on the new job list. I was quite wrong in thinking that the gamine with the pretty wardrobe would be one of those departing - she is here for the duration. Other wrong guesses will do doubt prove as chastening. As a general rule the young probably have more stamina.

I have chosen to remain with my current job, cleaning the toilets and washbasins in the men's dormitory. It doesn't take too long, takes place across the corridor from my room, and possibly carries extra status among spiritual persons on some kind of "those that are low shall be made high" basis.

My plan to abandon my watch and follow my feelings in how long I sit and walk hasn't totally worked out. There are still beepers, food bells, and the actions of my fellow meditators to contend with. Who's counting? I am, assiduously, including how long there is to go in the

course as a whole. Half way through tomorrow is the precise

mid point when there will be 14.5 days past and 14.5 to go (including the days of arrival and departure - 13.5 full days of meditation each way).

But I am, I must say, carrying my absurdities more lightly (eg the sentiments admitted in the two previous paragraphs). They arise as often as ever, but occasionally "I am not them and they are not mine" (to quote from Patrick's account of anatta, "not self"). Humour has also been arising from time to time and there is no better deflator of the false self.

14/1/06 3:49 PM

Ah! Patrick thinks that a sensation I had thought of as my breath and to be followed in meditation, is in fact a "disturbance" and to be gently avoided, "gone around". Might not sound like much, but useful knowledge to a meditator. I knew at some level that there was a problem but didn't articulate this either to myself or to Patrick because the "disturbance" gave me something that I could successfully attend to without being pulled away by distractions, and one is told that the breath can manifest in strange ways. However I am sure Patrick is right that it is an experience - everything he said rang true to my experience.

After a misty morning and a warm day, clouds again now with a cool evening breeze and perhaps another thunderstorm on the way. I though I heard very distant thunder earlier. I think there has been a thunderstorm most of the times I have been here, and certainly there has always been rain. I wonder what the annual rainfall is - something to look up when the net is restored to me in two weeks. I must say I have, now and then, noticed its absence, by way of mild frustration at not being able to instantly look things up instantly.

Tomorrow morning I will talk to Linda. A happiness. Patrick was talking about metta, the Pali word for loving-kindness the other night and it occurred to me that there is more loving kindness in my feelings for her than there has ever been for anyone else except my children. She is the best possible friend as well as a wonderful lover and wicked companion.

15/1/06 7:42 AM

A cool grey morning, again, the warble of the currawongs sounds close and lazy through the mist in the pines. My feet are cold – time for thick socks again. Thick thocks again. I stayed more or less close to the muted hysteria of my mind through breakfast this morning, following attention as it came and went from my body posture (i.e., tendency to slouch), to the sensations of spooning and chewing and swallowing (the last of which I found distasteful), to sounds and glimpses of other people (which, as always, made me tense), to an high-volume interior monologue (which I sometimes managed to bring to a stop by noticing it in mid-sentence). One of my resolutions a couple of days ago was to stay mindful through the day and not just in the meditation periods.

It seems most of us are staying, there will be no more than half a dozen new people. I wonder how they will alter the dynamics. It seems hardly the word for a group of people who spend their time sitting in silence or walking around very slowly, also in silence, but there is a group identity, or perhaps rather a group process, which will change with new people.

Time to go on a walking meditation, then to call Linda.

15/1/06 12:57 PM

It was lovely talking to her – in Perth, to my surprise. She had decided on the spur of the moment to make a quick trip over there for her Dad's birthday and to welcome her mum home. She sounded good. The sight of people leaving here combined with the pleasure of thinking about being at home with her probably conditioned a bit of a clock watching mood this morning. Just get this session over, and over a hundred more like it over the next two weeks, and I will be home. The mood is still with me, manifest in an urge to get up and start the next session right now although an hour of the rest period remains. It will go away, luckily, as nothing would make the time pass more slowly or less profitably.



My favourite forest walk

I am slowly learning to recognise states of mind, or of the heart-mind, "citta". Being at a distance from things and seeing nothing clearly on a walking meditation. While sitting, sleepiness that has nothing to do with tiredness. Malice colouring my internal narrative for several hours. What to do about them comes next: waiting for them to go away, of course, but there are things that can be done to hasten their leaving, or perhaps rather, avoid delaying their leaving by nourishing them with inappropriate responses. For example, the sleepiness has to be faced: taking a nap or a walk are both mistakes, according to Patrick. And the malice can be countered by practicing a loving-kindness meditation with oneself as object.

15/1/06

One of the subjects of this text is what I am doing to detach myself from a false idea of myself that I have constructed out of my greed, hatred and delusion over at least one lifetime. But the text clearly also functions to reinforce that false self. Its extent, elaboration and careful composition imply an authorial self of quality (in its own view, and it hopes others will think so too). A paradox Patrick has often mentioned: in this practice you want to achieve the end of wanting to achieve. Maybe I should stop writing it.

16/1/06 7:51 AM

A glimpse of not self, mundane, to do with a smell of coffee that was attractive but "I" wasn't there in the usual way. It was oddly frightening, and the self came back strongly with a story in which the experience was its achievement. But "I" wasn't really there for that story either. And then this self creating activity that is also not self. Just a story.

16/1/06 9:04 AM

The child sent to early to boarding school from a loving home and happy life may develop emotional and behavioural strategies to deal with the loss, and find those strategies still with him as habits 50 years later, to his detriment (or, I suppose, to his advantage: at least that was the theory). This is not a criticism either of the parents or of the boarding school. Everyone does this kind of thing, whatever their life path.



One of the meditation paths

16/1/06 1:28 PM

I do a lot of retrospective editing of this text. I tell myself it is of form, not content, and that is true in that I am usually tidying up the prose rather than adding or deleting material. But of course form is content if the real subject is the nature of the implied authorial self.

Evidently, I didn't stop writing. But something may change. I'm not so cosy with it.

After a sunny morning that had me changing into shorts and tee shirt, there was a brief rattle of rain during the last sitting meditation session before lunch and thunder in the distance. A Blue Mountains summer. I sat waiting for the lunch bell with very sore knees in that session but by the end was just hanging in there rather than meditating on the pain as I had done earlier, and felt I shaky afterwards. Something to learn from this about wise and unwise effort.

16/1/06 6:46 PM

Things have been getting a little hairy. The symptoms:

- < moving to the touching sitting practice, finding it satisfying because it gives me stillness, but there was an element of actively turning away from the breath and/or turning off the breath to do it
- < when the breath did come through it had an imposed rhythm and a hint of the "pulsing" element that I identified with disturbance

(although not, except once very briefly, around the eye),

- < then later breath becoming stronger so I couldn't do the touching sitting, the breath was too strong and it had a sort a metronomic rhythm,
- < there was a half blockage at the back of the nostrils, acutely sensitive - produced very strong aversion
- < the pulsing spreading to my body - once, while doing a standing meditation, to the abdomen?? (need to look closely at this if it recurs)
- < some problems with posture during these sittings, but actually I a little less desperate about posture, I have some idea what is going on
- < lots of energy and mindfulness (although I did notice I was in a hurry), good morale, clinical curiosity to track this stuff down, working hard
- < afterwards I felt a bit cool and distant, noticed I was clicking my teeth
- < I was certainly forcing things, seeking to ignore the breath/pulsing
- < a massive thunderstorm happening at the time (doesn't seem out of the question that might be relevant)
- < sitting cross-legged in the evening, sitting-touching established ok, although with a pulsing breath at the nostrils appearing at one point, not pursued. The problem has certainly been worse on chairs - which may be a coincidence.

16/1/06 7:43 PM

It is still raining heavily, after the most massive of thunderstorms, the stairways all turned to rivers and the decks all soaked. Luckily this place is on a hill. No dharma talk tonight, but I don't feel inclined to take the night off. I am not at tired and not here for recreational purposes. However, I must be careful not to get fanatical. I guess I could edit some pictures and take an early night. But I don't think so.

16/1/06 9:41 PM

I have had the feeling of the ground swaying under my feet while doing walking meditation around the hall several times. Tonight it was particularly strong, and on brick paving rather than on the elevated decking which I previously thought might actually be flexing a little. I took this as a sign it was time to come to bed. My reluctance to leave other people still sitting in the hall is still there, and no doubt always will be, but is certainly diminished in its grip on me - a passing thought rather than an obsession.



Another path for walking meditation

17/1/06 7:43 AM

Will it ever stop raining? Mind you, only one night of rain has produced this feeling, which says something about where I have spent my life. In some places it does rain for days and days. Here, we had a thunderstorm yesterday evening and it is still raining now, more than 12 hours later. Not at a constant rate, but never ceasing. For one who has lived in South Eastern Australia, this is against nature.

Mind flicking from restless to torpid and back again this morning. Habits of mind and emotion that are burdensome and that I thought I was escaping are still with me, which is frustrating to the self because it undermines the sense of progress on which it likes to feed. For instance, counting the minutes, hours, days, nights, regular events. The difference is that I am more able to see these as mind events that arise and that pass away. I am also becoming more able to see these mind events as habits ingrained by years of repetition but also conditioned in specific ways each time they arise (eg, as a response to some sort of

discomfort) and which I can choose to either feed with attention and emotional input or allow to go on their way.

It has stopped raining. Time to go walking.

17/1/06 1:00 PM

The rain came back in the late morning and now it is coming down hard again. All this can't only be directly over Medlow Bath (can it?) so it must have done something for Sydney's catchment. Someone has changed 29 to 28 for the termination date of this retreat on the list on the meditation hall door. Does that mean we leave on Saturday instead of Sunday? Must ask Patrick. I wouldn't mind at all, even though the missing day might just be the one on which I would achieve full enlightenment.

This morning's perspective on my sitting meditation: there is posture, the breath, expectation, intention (which can be more or less visible), habit, and various arising thoughts and feelings. Oh, and also pain. They are all happening in the body, often in contention and I am in trying to settle things down to the calm and stillness which are the objective of sitting meditation. Or, more like it, hoping that things will settle down. On the occasions when they do, it doesn't seem to have a lot to do with me. And most of the time what looks like stillness is really a kind of buttoning down in which some of the contenders are temporarily silenced. Pain usually has the last word, and drives the other contenders from the field, which is actually quite a pleasant feeling. Oh well. It is useful to know how far one is from one's goal. I certainly could usefully do more work on body and breath to support my meditation practice.

I had the thought this morning that my ordinary life, lived with the care and attention I am giving to my time here, would be wonderful beyond belief. No doubt the foundation of all those good resolutions which meditators make towards the end of a retreat.

17/1/06 7:15 PM

Patrick said he thought things were going as they should with my sitting meditation, and referred to opening up a can of worms. Can of

scorpions, I replied. I forgot to ask him about the end date of the course.

I took a chance that this afternoon's warm sunshine and clear sky marked a change in the weather and hung out some washing. But on the way to supper it was drizzling and there are thunderclouds to the north. So I had to bob each way and hung the only semi-essential (and then only if it goes on raining) items of my wash on the heated towel rail in the laundry. This weather is unbelievable. It is a relief that the rule of "noble silence" means we don't have to be talking about it.

Impressive platefuls of food, some of these meditators serve themselves. So writes Captain Smallportion, smug following a day of relative virtue. But not unaware that losing weight is also done for the sake of the false self.

I was thinking the other day of people I neglect: principally Debbie and Jake. I hope I can establish a loving friendship with Debbie when she returns to Australia. And take Jake out on his own now and then, or get him to come down to the coast. I hope he went down after Xmas - I gave him the petrol money, but I fear it might have gone on beer. I must also make more effort to contact and see Miranda. Maybe I could drive up to Newcastle for a weekend with Linda and the kids. The smaller brothers would enjoy the larger ones.

18/1/06 7:42 AM

I lost my bet on the weather - it rained again overnight, not heavily but enough to soak everything on the clothes line. So I was glad of the backup use of the towel rail. Another damp, misty morning. Some people have inordinant respect for their dentist's advice. Five (it must be) minutes ago I went over to the washroom to put the kettle on and glimpsed, through the entry hall window, a girl brushing her teeth on the porch of the women's dormitory. On going back to fill up my cup of Chinese green tea, there she was, still brushing away with undiminished vigour.

Patrick's talk on "Right View" last night was the one in which he points out that the Buddha certainly believed in reincarnation and also in multiple heavens, and that people with good karma can pop back into

life without the travail of birth. He didn't dwell on the last two, but noted that people who say the Buddha was only humouring local myths when he talked about reincarnation are suggesting he was a liar, and that people don't believe in reincarnation tend also to not believe in full enlightenment, because, given the magnitude of the task that becomes evident as you practice over time, who could do it in one lifetime? I suppose you could also think that the texts in which the Buddha expresses various beliefs were not written down until several hundred years after his death and in that period were filtered through many other minds.

Patrick also gave a good explanation of the Buddhist understanding of faith, as the attitude of someone who is willing to take part of the story on trust because he has found other parts to be true by experience. Given a map of unknown territory showing a path, your faith in the map grows stronger as you follow the path and find the it to have been accurate so far. I resisted what he said about reincarnation, multiple heavens etc, just as I did last year, but softened as the talk proceeded.

18/1/06 1:14 PM

It is Saturday 28th that the retreat ends. Ah well, there goes full enlightenment. Well worth it, to get home a day sooner. Drizzle and periods of light rain continued all morning. Patrick said something last night about a weather system that was taking its time to move on.

One has lots of what seem at the time to be great ideas on meditation retreats. I would stress the phrase "seem at the time" as an introduction to some of my own great ideas, which include:

- < combining cycling with fishing at Tuross;
- < laying in a large stock of green prawns for bait, *ibid.*;
- < developing a new form of art consisting of linked idea or image bubbles;
- < suggesting to Linda that she should organise an exchange with a science or art institution in the UK through the public service exchange scheme;
- < others, which temporarily escape me but which I promise to get down in writing when I remember them.

Linda sent me my care package of drugs. She bought everything new, and of the highest quality. It must have cost a fortune. She removed the price tag from the most expensive item. I owe her for this and various other payments.

18/1/06 4:47 PM

Morale and energy low this afternoon. Mind a bit raw. And I let myself get cold. See what a hot shower and a cup of green tea can do. And then meditate in my room, swathed in blankets.

18/1/06 7:28 PM

Morale was improved by the tea and shower and later by hot soup and ovaltine. My mind felt shell shocked, and there was a damning interpretation asking to be placed on my circumstance: three weeks in to an intensive course structured around meditating on the breath, and I discover I can't do it at all. My breath goes feral whenever I look at it. However, that line of thought is false. I have found another meditation technique which is interesting and useful for me because it helps me get in touch with my body, which I have treated carelessly over the years. The entanglements with the breath were there and I am on the way to letting go of them. And the spectacle of my discontent is there to be looked at, a prime example of my characteristic way of making myself miserable.



Maybe my favourite

1/19/06 7:51 AM

Cold and misty and damp again. The grass is beginning to squelch. Morale down before breakfast, improved now. Memo to self: pay attention to keeping warm. Linda said, a propos of Blair wearing only his skivvy in the British winter, that she doesn't believe you catch a cold by being cold. She may be right, but I still think it makes you vulnerable. And certainly it demoralises.

I am going to take my blanket to the meditation room. Meditation student chic manifests in blankets. You sit, and sometimes even walk, swathed in them. You can use the standard issue retreat centre blanket which tends to beige, with stripes, or sometimes dark brown. Or you can bring your own beautiful blanket or wrap or indeed, several, suited to different conditions. There are some lovely ones on this retreat. Having forgotten my Cameron Tartan blanket I will have to use the retreat centre item I picked up on the first day which looks a bit like xmas wrapping paper - red and green squares and stripes (a description that could also, I guess, apply to the Cameron Tartan blanket). But it does the job fine.

I also took to wearing both my pairs of long trousers. Thinking it would be hot, I brought only thin nylon camping trousers which, outside in this weather, have left my legs perpetually cold - but a layer system works well and luckily one pair is baggier than the other.

19/1/06 1:07 PM

At lunch today a meditator, helping himself to light sour cream to go with his banana cake, used his finger to wipe the spoon clean before putting it back in the sour cream, and then licked his finger clean. Ah, I thought, I would have been inclined to do that, might have done it, might not. I wonder if he hesitated. Two pieces of banana cake were allowed (the cooks use stick-it notes to advise on quantities). Guess who took only one, but made sure it was a large one?

How is it going, Patrick will probably ask at this afternoon's interview. My general answer is always fine, ok, etc, and my specific answer is always about problems. That does not mean the general answer is dishonest or conventional. If the task is dismantling one's delusions, dishonesties, stratagems, evasions etc, there are going to be problems.

It has stopped raining, looked brighter earlier but is dark again now, remains cold, and feels like more rain. Despite which, morale is high.

19/1/06 5:11 PM

An interesting sit. Things settled down, after some struggle. A stable, solid posture, but the body light at the same time. Energy, soft, and pain coming in as energy too, of a different frequency. And then allowing the pain in the breath some space without feeding it or suppressing it. Only for moment, and there was still imbalance present. And I found I had let myself get cold, so I am now wrapped in a blanket drinking a cup of weak green tea to get warm before going out to walk. In the interview, Patrick explained, once again, how all appears to be going as it should.

19/1/06 7:27 PM

I have an uncharitable thought. That affirms the self. I feel shame. That also affirms the self. I consider the sequence of thoughts/feelings and its implications in terms of the self. That also affirms the self. How do we get out of this eternal recurrence? We practice letting go, with increasing refinement, until there is nothing left to let go of and no-one left to let go of anything. For this meditator, on this retreat, a lot of affirming the self is going on, and some letting go.

I worked some more on keeping the breath at bay and then letting the pain in the breath come close. Strong aversion to specific tiny sensations, an acute fear of suffocation with no basis in reality. The self threatened. When it came close, one of the tiny sensations, at the back of the nostril, turned into a very subtle intense fluttering. I circled around the same sensations in another session, but couldn't get close to it.

20/1/06 7:41 AM

Grey and cold and wet again,

The outlook is for further rain.

Though here in hope of gain through pain,

I'd really rather be in Spain.



Two currawongs on a wire, grooming themselves, lifting their shoulders and angling their heads around to work in under their wings.

Keep warm and keep at it the motto for the day. I got cold again in the morning sit, even though the heaters in the meditation room had been turned on. My seat is just by the radiator and the window and far from the thermostat which regulates the heating, which means that I get large fluctuations in temperature and am often too warm or too cold. The solution I know: judicious use of a blanket, but I haven't mastered that. I wonder if anyone has noticed that the two small blankets I have in the meditation room are stolen goods, looted from airlines (Ansett and Emirates). Sitting here in bed after breakfast under a blanket typing, I feel my eyelids wanting to close. Struggle with drowsiness ahead for the morning – maybe. As I discovered yesterday, a dozy mind can flip over to a restless one instantly.

20/1/06 1:01 PM

My back was moderately sore with shooting pains in the last sitting meditation session and remained sensitive through lunch. Here's hoping it doesn't play up. Some of the morning exercises Patrick took us through in the first week, and which I and no doubt others are still doing in our rooms, are a little hard on it – but not, that I can feel on the part which is now hurting. I am tempted to take a couple of nurofen, but don't want to waste my supplies in case it gets worse.

As on several previous days, it has stopped raining and is a little

brighter, and hope springs eternal, but not very eagerly, as there is no break in the cloud cover or increase in the temperature. I had a morning of suffering, defined as the difference between how I wanted things to be and how they were. This came in various forms, of course - sore back etc - but in particular as the wholly self-inflicted suffering arising from the difference between how I wanted my meditation to be and how it was. A bit flat. Nothing much happening. Which, of course, was an opportunity to look at what the mind was doing in generating expectation and disappointment.

20/1/06 7:25 PM

After a day of inner and outer despondency the sun came out for a while in the evening and I reflected that I should trust the process and trust myself.

21/1/06 7:42 AM

A glad return

Of morning sun:

Our hopes reborn

With grey skies gone.



Birds are quick shitters. A tiny movement of the body almost too fast to see and the little white pellet falls. A magpie came and perched on the rail where I was sitting outside eating breakfast (he waited until later when was up his tree before relieving himself). His claws were shiny and new looking and he angled his head up and down and around to look in different directions, as they do. A young one, a lighter grey-black with a hint of brown, and scatty, came and shifted on his feet beside his parent for a while. I decided not to feed them - that is the prerogative of the permanent residents here who would have to put up with their calling cards on the deck, as I do (happily) at Tuross. The magpie family made themselves heard in the bushes outside the meditation hall yesterday evening, squabbling and wheedling and cooing in the most expressive way.

It is severe on self-deception, shabbiness, dishonesty, this practice. Patrick talked about Buddhist ethics last night, referring to shame (fear of our actions being exposed, to ourselves and people we respect) and dread (fear of the karmic consequences of our actions for ourselves and others) as key concepts. This morning I have had a thorough and

painful review of various actions of mine about which I feel shame and dread. I also experienced the truth of the teaching that ethics are the foundation of meditation practice. An unclear conscience means an unsettled mind.

I am feeling dozy again right now. It may just be because I am lying down to type. Or I may have another morning ahead of meditating through sleepiness. Time to go find out.

21/1/06 1:08 PM

No, sleepiness did not appear this morning.

The black cockatoos feed on pine cones, or probably rather on insects or grubs that live in them, in the big trees that grow on this property and all around it. They are messy feeders, dropping a constant rain of fragments, and sometimes whole cones with only a small corner torn off. The trees are tall and the cones are heavy and there are meditation paths in amongst the trees. No meditators have yet been lost. The cockies (or perhaps one of them, on guard duty), keep up a constant repetitive call while they are feeding, a soft shirring sound which insinuates its way into my walking meditation. I use it as a kind of marching tune to take care of the task of paying attention to my walking and allowing me to drift away in reverie.

On this kind of meditation retreat you notice many fragments of memory that come momentarily into the light of consciousness, and sometimes you pick one up and allow it to expand into a more detailed picture or story. I believe this happens all the time: you just notice it more on retreat. Moments or scenes from childhood in Sri Lanka, school, university life, married life. Not random fragments exactly, there is always some quality in the moment that made it memorable, even if sometimes it can be hard to put into words what it is. And sometimes it does not just float up from memory, it is attracted by some similarity with the present moment.

So, the pines here bring up big pine trees that I remember as being near the golf club in Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka, nearly 50 years ago. I might have been with another child, perhaps my brother Allan or my cousin Terry or a school friend. Parents were inside doing parent things

but it was more interesting out in the pines. The carpet of needles was thick underfoot. I have been there in dreams but could not find the place when I returned to Sri Lanka in 1996. If Ella takes up her job offer in Sri Lanka later this year I will visit her and might have another look.

And the mist and cold bring up the Horton Plains, a high open area with tussock grass and little rhododendron trees and a trout stream running through it, where we used to go fishing (again in Sri Lanka). I am off fishing by myself, taking a short cut over a ridge where the river makes a u-turn. The river runs down into the jungle, a long way, further than the path, but down there, below a big waterfall, there will be fabulous trout that are easy to catch because no-one ever fishes for them. Then, even further down, the river comes out into the mid-country where it is warm with fruit trees and brown people in little houses under flowering trees. There it begins a new life, no longer a trout stream, for the trout, like us, live in the high country.

And smaller, less charged memories come up too. The store at Echo Lake above Lake Tahoe.

21/1/06 7:34 PM

In sitting meditation I have been struggling with rapid and accelerating breath and pulsation around the nostrils, which Patrick calls a "disorder" - and it certainly feels like one. Tonight I found a simple solution. Open my eyes and it goes away. And later, relaxing my face also seemed to help.

22/1/06 7:39 AM

A lovely morning, the birdsong limpid, the notes individually placed and falling softly through the air, none of the screeching and squawking you get at other times from our much-loved Australian avifauna. The sun at 7.30 is already higher in the sky than it was at mid-day in the Scottish winter from which we have just returned. It will be a hot day, a shorts and t-shirt day, so that the summer clothing which I brought up here will get some use.

This glass is already broken, says Patrick last night, holding up his glass of water and quoting Ajahn Chah to illustrate the knowledge of

impermanence. So, this computer is already broken too. Oh dear. Now there is a measure of my resistance to insight. I later thought of photographs of a glass, broken and unbroken, to add to my series of twin pictures.

I am feeling sad, bruised, chastened. The path is long and hard and I have barely started on it, my delusions are deep-seated, I am tightly bound to my emotional habits, my practice is erratic at best and my motives are suspect. The gap between what I understand in theory and what I have experienced in practice seems wide and is no doubt wider than I know. And so on. Just thoughts and feelings that have arisen and that will pass, the colour of the glass the heart/mind is looking through this morning. I do have some understanding of that truth, and also that the false self is quickly to inhabit these feelings. It's time to do some walking meditation, then go call Linda. Now that thought changes the colour of the glass. Ha!

22/1/06 12:53 PM

And it was nice, talking to her. News of domestic life made a few splashes and ripples in the frog pond of the mind, settling and promptly replaced by others, self-generated. Some people do meditation retreats as if they were carrying around a full bowl of water and trying very hard not to spill a drop. I admire them, but I know I am going to spill some and work to refill the bowl a few times every day.

Linda declared that if I wanted to head off down the coast straight away I should do just that. Of course I don't, and she doesn't want me to. I guess she makes the offer because she doesn't want me to feel trapped, and in thinking that I might, she is showing her construction of things, the nature and strength of her feelings and fears. Also perhaps as a kind of recompense for telling me how much she has missed me.

22/1/06 7:27 PM

Spending many hours a day walking slowly round a wild garden and looking downwards, one notices lots of smaller life forms. Ants, everywhere. A tiny moth, brown with red spots, dead or dying in numbers on the ground. Small black worms inching across the meditation paths. Centipedes floating along on the waves their legs make as they ambulate ("walk" seems inadequate). Slugs appearing after dark to set an example of slow movement to walking meditators.

Spiders descending from on high on long single threads of silk or building doomed webs across the paths that end up draped over my face. Small long legged flies prowling about apparently at random, probably seeking something smaller to devour. Butterflies when the sun shines.

And, of course, the mosquitoes. Not too bad so far. I am a coward and apply a lot of repellent, but they have still found feeding places, especially the backs of my hands which are out there for the taking when one is meditating.

Snails came out in the rain and meditators had difficulty in keeping their vows not to take life, especially in the unmown grass off the paths, or after dark. No mistaking that crunching sound, sometimes followed by a little gasp of dismay from the perpetrator.

23/1/06 7:44 AM

Into the last week. Keep on doing it and seeing what comes up. Thoughts of the future will no doubt feature, and also disappointment that things are not as I would wish them to be. To be noted, in the present. There seems to be quite a bit of unavoidable struggling in meditation, but something Patrick said last night rang true for me - what you have to do is keep out of the way and let the natural process take its own course.

23/1/06 1:31 PM

A sunny morning, but now it is clouding over and a thunderstorm feels possible, but if we get one it will probably be only a local affair - the previous weather system does seem to have moved on.

A Korean lady who I think is Patrick's partner is one of the cooks for the last week and lunch today was agreeable and quite different from the aussie vegetarian we have mostly had so far - not that there has been anything wrong with that. Quantities looked a little modest at first glance, but our numbers have reduced and there were more dishes than usual, so as it turned out there was plenty. Two kinds of rice, a mashed potato bake, cold noodles and a green salad. I haven't said a whole lot about the food, which has been very good, as it always is

here. One is encouraged to make eating into a meditation. Mine is generally one in which there are a lot of thoughts, stimulated in my case by the social pressure of eating in silent proximity to strangers.



23/1/06 7:22 PM

Supper was nice too. Not Korean, gazpacho and nachos (which may for all I know be very popular in Korea). A nice soft evening – there was a local thunderstorm but we only got a few drops. Four full days to go and I am already coming up with wise and modest summaries of the retreat, ostensibly for Patrick's benefit but of course totally for my own. It is amazing how tirelessly the self works at creating and defending itself, how it spins on everything that happens. Of course, from its point of view, my sitting meditation, largely struggle and pain, is not the most promising raw material and needs a bit of reshaping to look good. Can be done, of course, and no doubt will be, over the next four days. Happily right now it has gone quiet in that direction.

24/1/06 7:43 AM

A nice morning sit left me with a calm feeling, which breakfast stirred up nicely, as mealtimes usually do. But things are settling back down now, and the day ahead will go however it does, with pleasant and unpleasant feelings of various kinds. It is nice to be in the home straight of the retreat. But there is also fear of going back to the world. This environment has allowed me to clearly see my deep habits of mind and heart, but also offered protection from their impact. One is on the watch for them and there is little practical opportunity to indulge them (nothing to buy, to drink, constructive activity for every waking moment). Things will be different out there, of course.

24/1/06 1:28 PM

A cool breeze from the south east came in mid-morning and brought

shreds of mist blowing through the pines, but it is warm and sunny again now. Another nice Korean lunch with corn patties and vegetarian spring rolls (the uncooked kind) and rice with a vegetable stir fry, followed by a fruit salad featuring grapes and watermelon. There – that will do for menus – whatever wonders we are fed in the rest of the week will go unchronicled. I wouldn't want to give the impression that I am just here for the food.

The positive side of going back to the world is the opportunity to more fully inhabit my life and take more advantage of the opportunities it offers. Good resolutions along those lines pop up now and then. As Linda has often said, I have no excuse for not having a great time, and among other things this practice is training for having a great time. Doing things attentively and wholeheartedly never does any harm.

I finally seem to be at least partly released from my anxiety about whether I am working hard enough, whether everyone else is meditating for longer than me, etcetera. It is not that I don't still have thoughts along those lines – the difference is that they no longer have much grip on me, they just pop up and go away without sucking me in. Mostly, and mostly is probably the best I can hope for, ever. Those sort of anxieties will probably be always with me.

24/1/06 7:17 PM

Hmm. I spent much of the last meditation session trying to diminish a dull pain around the solar plexus by subtle adjustments to my posture, and wondering what irregularity of the chi or the prana might be causing it. When it persisted through dinner, and improved following a modest belch on the way back to my room, I decided it must have been wind.

I asked Patrick again about the feeling which the ground is swaying under me when I do walking meditation ([see above](#)), which I thought he had said reflected some kind of imbalance, and which I now feel everywhere. He said no, it just reflects strong concentration, nothing to worry about.

The mist and cold returned and it is very still. But it doesn't feel like serious rain is on the way. Just mountain evening weather. Medlow Bath

is over 1000 meters high, which is well above Canberra or Queanbeyan.

25/1/06 7:41 AM

The mountain evening weather continued through the night and into the morning. Not a lot of rain, but cold and dripping and no wind so it could sit around all day.

I had a vague expectation that at the end of a month-long retreat my mind would be suffused with a golden glow and everything would be peaceful and dreamy. Not this mind. Cranky and impatient would be a better description, right now. Not that there haven't been peaceful moments and there may be a few more before the end. But they really aren't the point. Attending to whatever comes up is the point, and for that my mind is quite clear and sharp and my determination and resourcefulness are strong. The trick will be to keep them soft and subtle as well. My usual inclination towards a "crash through or crash" approach may be encouraged by the sense of an end in sight.



The main building

25/1/06 1:09 PM

It is one of those days on which it seems to be raining harder under the trees than out in the open, because the mist or fine drizzle condenses on the leaves and then falls as larger drops. At one moment you see only a mist, then very fine lines drift slowly down, usually at an angle even if there is no breeze, and if there is one, swaying at its touch. Is that what they mean by a "Scotch mist"? No, I think that is a very thick mist, dense enough to quickly make you wet. Like the Scots, according to the English. There are probably dialect English words for different kinds of rain and languages which make finer discriminations than English. They talk about a "haar" in the north east of Scotland - a heavy fog from the sea that builds up overnight and can stay all day, but is also very local, the sun might be shining in the next v village.

I find myself thinking about what to do next with this practice. I don't want to become a monk or other kind of full-timer. More retreats, I suppose, combined with a regular practice at home. And becoming an active supporter of this dharma center.

25/1/06 7:27 PM

Up and down this afternoon with sitting meditation - first a real struggle with posture and various pains which left me thinking I can't do it, then a relatively tranquil and untroubled hour up until tea. It is interesting how the relative magnitude of felt pain can differ from the relative strength of the sensation. What makes the difference is how much aversion there is, and that is to do with whether the self feels threatened. Modest sensations of pain in my solar plexus, chest and nostrils are relatively much worse than stronger pain in the legs and buttocks. And there is a tiny pain, at the back of my nostrils, which is intolerable.

The walking, when I manage to pay skilful attention rather than just doing it on automatic pilot, can be rather nice, reminding me that just being in the natural world is intensely pleasurable.

26/1/06 7:38 AM

The project manager is hard at work on a preliminary evaluation. An important part of the agenda. Keeps bothering me with it, which I could do without, preferring as I would that my mind be on higher things. But of course the activities of the project manager need to be closely monitored, along with everything else. The retreat is nearly over now. Which is liberating. I am going to make it, I will have my life back soon, for the remaining time there is the practice to be done, with less need to hold anything back or perform for the audience (of one). May as well enjoy it.

More drizzle, it looks like, overnight. Umbrella and Goretex required for walking meditation. Off we go.

1/26/06 1:18 PM

Another thunderstorm is building after the drizzle cleared to a nice warm morning. An agitated mind - the prospect of leaving, of course. But I haven't relaxed my effort. Just something else to take into account.

I am feeling much friendlier towards my fellow meditators. No more grim competitive thoughts - any remaining hint of malice is light and warmed by empathy - we have all been through this together and it is a strong bond. I have forgiven them for having been conscripted into my inner drama.

Nearly the end of this production as well. A few more entries, a few pictures to put in and then - silence? I don't know. Maybe a blog again. It is part of my routine here, but could easily drop off the program "out there".



Another renegade

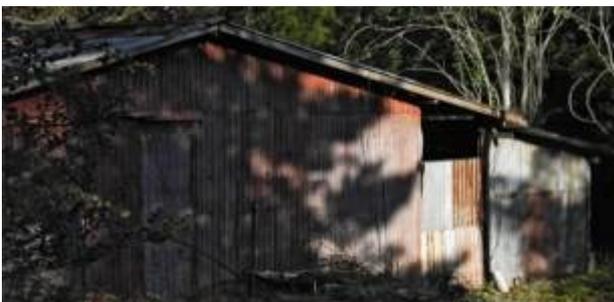
1/26/06 7:23 PM

Someone actually missed supper to go on meditating tonight. An older man, rather graceful, nice clothes, a very convincing sitting posture and good endurance. He came up to the dining room afterwards looking grave and composed. I imagined him understanding something significant, and was delighted for him. Earlier, the woman in front of me in the schedule for interviews came out of hers looking angry, and still looked that way a few minutes later when I came out. I wonder what that was about.

As for myself, I am not, as I thought I might be, particularly agitated by the prospect of returning to life out there . Just on my way out of here in spirit. Giving myself meditation instructions in a country and western accent is one significant clue. Patrick said he thought I had had a good retreat and become a more skilful meditator. I think that is about right. A lot of it has been a struggle, but an interesting one that needed to be had. I thanked him for his teaching and gave him dana.

27/1/06 7:46 AM

The last full day, and the last entry in this journal. There is going to be enough self talk in my head over the next 24 hours without adding to it. Concluding arrangements will have us talking over lunch today, then a dhamma question time and no dhamma talk in the evening, otherwise today as normal. Tomorrow as normal until 11, then wind up, sharing circle and lunch. I am going to leave after breakfast. I know I will want to get going, and so shall do so. I would probably do this even if there were no sharing circle (in which we sit around in a circle and people share anything they want to, and everyone else practices receptive listening). However, the fact that there is one does not make me want to linger. I feel guilty about this and am making up explanations for it in my head. But my intention is clear.



Over the fence

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