

About De-Tong Ling Retreat Centre

De-Tong Ling is situated on 1300 acres of rolling wilderness in NW Kangaroo Island. Its virtually untouched location, with spacious vistas over the bush and out to sea, and the peace provided by its isolated location, make this land extremely well-suited for retreat. Over time, development sympathetic to the environment has made this possible, consistent with the long-term aim to provide highly conducive conditions for Buddhist study and meditation in retreat conditions. The Centre's other primary purpose is to promote the study, practice and preservation of the Gelugpa School of Tibetan Buddhism, and in particular the teachings of its founder Lama Tsong Khapa.

Since the Centre's inception, much effort has been made to set in place thorough and detailed plans for its future development. It was seen as essential to gain all relevant government approvals before seeking support for the Centre's main components, which comprise:

1. An Enlightenment Stupa, with a public teaching hall and gallery below, situated by a dam and surrounded by gardens.
2. Twelve secluded, self-contained retreat houses for teacher, manager and student accommodation.
3. A Group Retreat Facility, surrounded by landscaped grounds:
 - o office, kitchen and dining room block
 - o accommodation, laundry and ablution block
 - o large meditation hall containing a library
 - o workshop and five duplex accommodation units
4. A separate meditation hall built in traditional Tibetan style.



Immediately adjacent to De-Tong Ling is a 450-acre property owned by the students of Kyabje Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche who offered the land to him. *Yacca Creeks*, as this land is known, supports the centre with its buildings, infrastructure and resident community. It also provides an excellent supply of pure water from the fifteen-million-gallon dam near the Enlightenment Stupa. This is gravity-fed to the retreat houses and the large community vegetable garden and fruit orchard being developed to provide fresh organic food for both individual and group retreats. Importantly, the resident Yacca Creeks community maintains an ongoing liaison with the KI community.

Several other holy objects are now located near the Enlightenment Stupa – a large prayer wheel within a small stone building, and a stunning Padmasambhava statue set in a nearby pond.

In the decades to come, as the world becomes ever more polluted and busy, our vision is that De-Tong Ling Retreat Centre will always remain as a place of peace and purity, offering a range of retreat opportunities, from an hour by the Stupa to years in isolation. The quality of the Centre's natural environment – uncompromised by its use – as well as its remote location, will play a vital role in the success of those retreats.

One day, perhaps, De-Tong Ling Retreat Centre will produce a Buddha.



A Brief History of De-Tong Ling Retreat Centre

In 1978 a property of 1904 acres of scrub was purchased by a group of young, enthusiastic people, who named it *Yacca Creeks*. Gen Rinpoche Lama Lhundrup, the Abbot of Kopan Monastery in Nepal, visited the land in 1987 and gave valuable advice on how to develop it as a retreat centre. In 1988 devoted students offered the land for use as a retreat centre to Kyabje Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, the long-time director of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT). He gave the future centre the name De-Tong Ling, meaning “place of bliss and void”.

Later that year, Khensur Losang Thubten Rinpoche, ex-Abbot of Sera-je monastery in India, performed the first Dharma activity – a fire puja – on the land, making the prophecy that “many great meditators will come here”. In 1993 the Centre’s Spiritual Director, Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, performed practices on the retreat centre land for the success and welfare of all who do retreat there. Rinpoche commented at that time that the retreat centre “gives hope”.

The actual development of the retreat centre began in 1994. Increasing numbers of students studying Tibetan Buddhism in Australia sought suitable places to integrate their understanding through extended meditation retreat. De-Tong Ling was specifically designed to meet this need.



Initially one small retreat hut was constructed and served as the “gompa” (meditation place) for a number of group and individual dharma practices and retreats. It was clear that the potential existed for a successful retreat centre to be established, but that potential had to be actualised.



Early years were spent finalising payments for the land and completing the necessary survey and legal work. After years of careful planning and finally gaining the approvals from state and local government, four earth-construction retreat houses were built. Another house of rammed earth is now occupied by the resident Centre Manager. All buildings on the property are energy-efficient - carefully designed and with solar power.

Located by the large dam is the beautiful 14-metre-high Enlightenment Stupa, set above a meditation room surrounded by verandahs. Dedicated volunteers took many years to construct this wonderful building, beginning in 2002 with the making of over 8000 mud bricks. The Stupa was finally consecrated by Lama Zopa Rinpoche in 2015, in the presence of many students. A stone building enclosing a large prayer wheel is adjacent, completed in 2019.

Planning for the Group Retreat Facility began in 2011 across the dam from the Stupa, and once the design drawings were approved and the concrete slabs laid a few years later, construction of the rammed earth walls began in 2018. Since then, with the support of a truly kind and generous benefactor, building has continued with few obstacles. First to be constructed was the Accommodation and Ablution Block, which has already hosted a group retreat. Further work is underway. Refer to the relevant page on this website for information on progress: [Group Retreat Facility](#)

About the environment

De-Tong Ling is located within a large area of mostly natural vegetation that stretches across the western end of Kangaroo Island, made up of Wilderness Protection Areas and National Parks. Of the 1300 acres of scrub the Centre is situated on, 900 acres are completely untouched (apart from the impact of occasional fires in the past) and are preserved in perpetuity under a Native Vegetation Heritage Agreement with the South Australian government. This area is assessed as having significant conservation value and the agreement ensures the native plants and wildlife on the property are protected forever. Even though the remaining acres were logged in 1969, the vegetation there has rapidly returned to its natural state. Before work on the Retreat Centre could begin, consent had to be granted by the Native Vegetation Council for modification of the site vegetation and was subject to the conditions:

- that a Native Vegetation Management Plan and a Fire Management Plan be developed (these were drawn up in 1998), and
- that rehabilitation/revegetation of existing disturbed areas be undertaken (this has continued since that time).



Kangaroo Island still retains much of its native flora and is renowned for its rich and beautiful plant diversity. There are nearly 900 native plant species recorded on the island, and of the 41 species endemic to it, 11 have been observed on the De-Tong Ling property. The natural vegetation there is classified as semi-heath and semi-closed low mallee scrub, which provides a glorious display of wildflowers, mainly in Spring. It shelters a diverse range of fauna, often in large numbers – kangaroos, wallabies, pygmy possums, birds, snakes and lizards, as well as elusive and endangered echidnas and bandicoots. The tiny KI dunnart is only found on Kangaroo Island and is considered to be critically endangered. These days it is entirely restricted to the western end of the island and sadly over 90% of its known habitat was destroyed by the 2020 bushfires. Like much of the other fauna, it is vulnerable to feral cats. However, thankfully foxes and rabbits are entirely absent on the island.



The devastating bushfires of December 2019 - January 2020 that burnt almost half the island fortunately did not damage the De-Tong Ling property but came close to its boundaries. Since then, *KI Land for Wildlife* has coordinated the formation of the *North West Conservation Alliance (NWCA)*, a group of private landholders who manage habitat in one section of the NW corner of KI that wasn't burned during the fires (which includes De-Tong Ling and Yacca Creeks). This area forms a significant refuge for a large number of plant and animal species that were heavily impacted by the bushfire, many of them endemic to KI, and hence warrants strong conservation measures.



Government database records and recent surveys indicate that the NWCA area supports many native species that are listed (or are in the process of being listed) as threatened at a national, state or regional level, or have been identified as a priority for urgent management assessment or intervention due to the impacts of the 2019/20 fires. They are:

- 27 animal species, including the KI Glossy Black Cockatoo, the KI Dunnart and the KI Echidna
- 60 plant species of the over 193 species present in the area

KI Land for Wildlife received a grant to develop and implement actions to protect this unburned area from the impacts of future bushfires. Working closely with NWCA they have produced a landholder Fire Management Agreement designed to reduce the likelihood of a bushfire in the area within the next 10 years, to minimise its impact if it does occur, and to use fire to enhance habitat. De-Tong Ling and Yacca Creeks are preparing a strategy to fulfill the agreement, which specifies measures such as improvement of fire access tracks, fire breaks and fire-fighting resources, and management of fuel reduction to protect environmental and built assets.



In this uncertain world we live in, De-Tong Ling Retreat Centre will not only be a haven for nature but also a place for humans to nurture their positive qualities, for the benefit of all sentient beings.

