

THE GREAT STUPA OF Universal Compassion TAKES SHAPE



From left: A view from the Peace Park filled with young bodhi trees, January 2014. Steel framework for the bumpa is erected on top of the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion, January 2014. Photos by Ian Green.

Rising 26 meters (85 feet) above the bushlands of central Victoria, Australia, the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion has grown well past the halfway point. “We have another 20-21 meters (66-69 feet) to go to reach the complete height,” Ian Green, project director, told *Mandala* during a phone call in January 2014.

Most recently the steel framework for the two-story high *bumpa* was erected on top of the six-level concrete structure. The *bumpa* level of the stupa will contain the stupa’s collection of holy relics. It will also be the highest level that the general public will be able to visit and take in the impressive view of the area.

More progress will be made between now and September 2014, when the Great Stupa hosts the CPMT meeting, which will bring FPMT representatives together from around the world. Following the week-long meeting, Lama Zopa Rinpoche will present a month-long course inside the Great Stupa, beginning on September 25.

Before Rinpoche arrives and the CPMT meeting starts, work is being done to complete the structure that has been built so far. This includes installing all windows and doors in order to make the building weather-tight. Once fire-fighting services, flooring,

heating and lighting are installed, Ian expects to receive the occupancy certificate for the main gomba.

In addition, the exterior of the stupa will be painted. “That in itself is a massive exercise. It’s an incredible amount of paint,” Ian said. “We’ll also have the first 40 prayer wheels installed on the exterior.” Eventually, 280 prayer wheels, covered by a canopy, will surround the stupa’s base. Landscaping and planting are also being done for the Peace Park, the site’s surrounding gardens. For the CPMT meeting, Ian and his crew will finish up surfaces outside the stupa, install lighting and complete some landscape features, including a large waterfall that uses recycled water and hopefully a 6-by-4 meter (20-by-13 foot) pond with an 8-meter (26-foot) Quan Yin statue.

“We have a flow chart with all the issues that need to be addressed by September and the order in which they need to be done. For example, painting will proceed after the filling and sanding; prayer wheels will be installed after the painting and so on. The architect who designed the stupa said it was like designing the Rubik’s Cube from the inside out. Finishing the stupa is like that too. We need to get the sequence in the right order to have things work.”

After the retreat, the next step will be to clad the steel framework of the bumpa. In 2015 the contractors will fabricate the top 20 meters (66 feet) of the stupa on the ground. This includes the *harmika*, rings for the spire, the parasol, and the finial with the moon, sun and flame. “Once it’s all ready, in one day we’ll be able to install the life force tree (*sog shing*), which is 13 meters (43 feet) long, and hoist everything up, lock it into position and complete the structure. That should be by the end of next year,” Ian said. After that the project will move into the decoration phase, which could take decades.

The stupa will have many large statues in it, including a 6-meter (13-foot) 1000-armed Chenrezig in the main gumpa. On the gumpa’s ceiling, a 20-meter (66-foot) square Kalachakra mandala will be painted. The Jade Buddha for Universal Peace will also be installed in the stupa, once its worldwide tour ends.

“I’m imagining if I live for another 10-20 years, I should definitely see the outside of the stupa and the inside main gumpa complete. But I doubt I’ll see every shrine room on every level finished. There may be up to 80 of them,” Ian said. During Rinpoche’s visit in September, Ian hopes to get specific advice on the shrine rooms. “It’s like building one of the great cathedrals in Europe that took 100 years to complete. We need to remind ourselves that that’s what we are doing and think in these longer timelines.”

Ian likened the process of creating the Great Stupa to climbing a mountain: “Now and then when you reach a milestone, you can look at the top of the mountain but mostly you just look at where your feet are going. Receiving the occupancy certification and hosting the CPMT meeting and Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s retreat will be one of those milestones. And it will be



*An aerial view of the Great Stupa, 2013.
Photo courtesy of Dee Nisanke.*

one of the most gratifying moments for all of the many people who have been involved,” Ian said.

“It’s extremely exciting to have the CPMT meeting at the Great Stupa. We’ve created it to be a focal point for major Buddhist events in Australia. To have a major event with the CPMT and Rinpoche is a wonderful thing to be able to do. And to have people coming from all over the world from the FPMT family, we’re really looking forward to that.”

For updates on the Great Stupa, please visit www.stupa.org.au. For details on Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s retreat at the Great Stupa, see www.lamazopaaustralia.org.au.

For more on the CPMT meeting, see page 53.

Padmasambhava’s Instruction on Offerings to Stupas Now Available!

Lama Zopa Rinpoche recently finished a brand new translation of a teaching on the benefits of offering to stupas: *Padmasambhava’s Instruction on Offerings to Stupas*, published as a booklet by FPMT Education Services. The monumental work took Rinpoche more than two months to complete in 2013. The text, which Rinpoche would like to be used far and wide, details the benefits of circumambulating and prostrating, making offerings and offering service to stupas. It begins:

“King Trisong Detsen requested, ‘Hey, Great Master, what are the benefits of prostrating to, circumambulating, making offerings, offering service and so forth to the great stupa, which in nature embodies all the buddhas of the three times?’...”

The free booklet is available in several downloadable formats in English as well as in Italian. You can find it on Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s advice page on FPMT.org, under “holy objects.”

<http://fpmt.org/teachers/zopa/advice/>