

Takten Hermitage (Rtags bstan ri khrod)



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Location and Layout

The words *rtags bstan* mean “revealed sign.”¹ According to one source,² when the famous Dge lugs pa *bla ma*, [Pha bong kha bde chen snying po \(1878-1941\)](#), was looking for a retreat place in the hills north of Se ra, he arrived at this site and had a vision in which a crow spoke to him. This was the “sign” that “revealed” to him that this was the spot where he should remain in retreat.

The hermitage (*ri khrod*) is located northeast of Se ra and just east of [Trashī Chöling Hermitage \(Bkra shis chos gling ri khrod\)](#). It takes about fifty minutes to walk from Rtags bstan to Se ra, but only about fifteen minutes to reach Bkra shis chos gling. Rtags bstan is the third hermitage at which pilgrims stop during the “Sixth-Month Fourth-Day” (*drug pa tshe bzhi*) pilgrimage. (To see images of this pilgrimage taken in 2002, please click [here](#).)

¹ In fact the words can be spelled two other ways in Tibetan, and each spelling has a different meaning. When spelled *rtags brtan*, the words mean “stable or trustworthy sign.” When spelled *rtag brtan*, they mean “permanent and stable.” Ser smad spom ra dge bshes ye shes dbang phyug, *Ser smad thos bsam nor gling grwa tshang gi chos 'byung lo rgyus nor bu'i phreng ba* [*A History of the Sermé Tösam Norling College: A Garland of Jewels*] (Bylakuppe: Sermey Printing Press, 1984), 39, prefers the “revealed sign” (*rtags bstan*) etymology. Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* [*The Great Dungkar Dictionary*] (Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2002), 985, prefers the “permanent and stable” (*rtag brtan*) etymology.

² Ye shes dbang phyug, *Ser smad lo rgyus* [*A History of Sera Mé*], 39.

The hermitage for the most part consists of caves. Façades (and sometimes rooms) have been added in front of the cave entrances. There are a few [separate buildings](#) that have not been constructed onto the face of the cliff, however. Self-arisen images (*rang byon*) are ubiquitous throughout the site. One of the most important is the self-arisen image of [one of the eyes of Cakrasaṃvara \(Bde mchog\)](#),³ and indeed Rtags bstan in general is renowned as a site with a strong connection to this deity. There is also a famous [spring](#) whose waters are said to have magical, curative properties. The spring is connected with the deity Na ro mkha' spyod ma.



The eye of Cakrasaṃvara in one of Rtags bstan's caves.

History

The famous Dge lugs pa scholar/*yogi* Dben sa pa blo bzang don grub (1504/5-1565/6)⁴ lived in a cave at the site at some point in his life. And, as has been mentioned, Pha bong kha bde chen snying po also lived at Rtags bstan for a period of time in the 1930s with some of his students. But apart from these few facts, we can say little about Rtags bstan at this point in time.

The hermitage was a monk's institution before 1959, and (since the 1930s at least) belonged to the Pabongkha Lama's estate (Pha bong kha bla brang). Today, only Dge lugs pa nuns live at the site, and it is they who are responsible for any restoration that has been done to the hermitage. Rtags bstan today has a strong connection with Bkra shis chos gling, the other hermitage that has traditionally belonged to the Pabongkha Lama's estate.

³ The other two eyes of the deity are located at [Pabongkha Hermitage \(Pha bong kha ri khrod\)](#) and at [Garu Nunnery \(Ga ru dgon pa\)](#).

⁴ For a biography of Dben sa pa, see Janice D. Willis, *Enlightened Beings: Life Stories from the Ganden Oral Tradition* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 51-70.



Bundled up on a cold day, a Rtags bstan nun makes multiple “water-bowl offerings” as a way of accumulating merit.