



Newsletter
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Gay Buddhist Fellowship

The Gay Buddhist Fellowship supports Buddhist practice in the Gay men's community. It is a forum that brings together the diverse Buddhist traditions to address the spiritual concerns of Gay men in the Bay Area, the United States, and the world. GBF's mission includes cultivating a social environment that is inclusive and caring.



The Ajanta cliff with carved entrances; river lower right.

Buddhist Cave Temples in India

Text and photos by Kevin Havener

Around-the-world afares were cheap in 1988, and in September of that year I went west from San Francisco, eventually stopping in India for 16 days. Being interested in archaeology as well as in Buddhism, one of my goals was to visit the ancient Ajanta and Ellora rock-cut temples and monasteries, situated in river valleys near the city of Aurangabad (in central Maharashtra state, east of Bombay/Mumbai). The state-run Indian tour agency gave excellent tours of these remote sites, which Indian people themselves took. One elderly Indian couple was very determined to visit: the wheelchair-bound woman paid two strong young men to carry her around the sites in a makeshift sedan-chair.

Cut from living rock cliffs, the temples and monasteries sometimes echoed their wooden predecessors, with imitation wooden beams and other structural elements painstakingly carved into the stone. Artistic styles changed over generations of royal dynastic patronage, and depictions of Buddha's visage grew from plainly symbolic, to intricately decorated high-relief figures. Some of these man-made caves had numerous deep rooms, 30 to 50-foot high ceilings, and even multiple stories with interior columns and staircases. Most of the caves were inhabited by bats (and the

