Eureka Valley is a vast open space that stretches on for miles. Here the scale of desolate earth and expansive sky is something to behold. “Clear, open, awake, without color or form, containing all things, yet not limited by them,” writes Jack Kornfield. What better container, what better mirror, for an expansive state of mind than the vast open space of Eureka Valley?

“Open Desert, Open Mind” draws upon the wilderness-based tradition of the School of Lost Borders and the spiritual practice of sitting meditation to create a unique program for desert contemplatives. This is neither a typical SOLB program nor a typical meditation retreat, but a blend of the two. The usual SOLB program invites participants to spend time alone on the land to access a deeper telling of their own story (while a wide-open desert setting naturally encourages an inner stillness that supports this deeper telling). A meditation retreat usually invites participants to move beyond the telling of stories in search of inner stillness (though often a deeper knowing of one’s own story is a gift found within that stillness). Here we will draw on both traditions.

While this program draws some from Buddhist teachings, no particular religious orientation or spiritual affiliation is asked of participants - nor is any excluded. That said, comfort with a regular meditation schedule is recommended. During the first four days together, we will weave together a tapestry of inner and outer exploration. Mornings will be a mix of sitting practice and council time for stories about what is coming up while sitting, with each successive morning becoming more silent than those before. Afternoons will start with several hours alone on the land to invite clear open awareness, inside and out. Late afternoons and evening will again be a mix of sitting and council, including time to have our stories mirrored by others. The morning of the fifth day, participants will be smudged out for a 24-hour solo fast in the desert. After a day of reentry, we’ll then spend two full days hearing everyone’s story, inviting a mirror of each story from both the desert expanse and the two guides.

Visit www.schooloflostborders.org for a full schedule of the School’s wilderness courses.
Program information: Enrollment is limited to 12. We will rendezvous on Saturday, October 17th, at 11 a.m. in Big Pine, California, moving from there to our base-camp in the backcountry. We anticipate camping together the entire week, finishing by mid-morning on Sunday, October 25th. We will provide dinner the first night and the breakfast after the solo time. Otherwise we ask everyone to come prepared to live self-sufficiently, which means bringing your own camping equipment and food for the week. More detailed logistical information will be sent out prior to the program’s start.

A note to people with limited wilderness experience: Though we will be camping out for the entire week, activities undertaken will be non-strenuous and our emphasis will always be “safety first.” We will provide a list of personal equipment that each participant should bring and we will also provide some group equipment for our base-camp. We may be able to loan limited personal equipment as needed and if we are unable, we can provide advice about what to purchase or rent.

Meditation schedule: The program will include a regular meditation schedule, beginning with an optional sunrise sit, then group sits to start the morning and afternoon sessions, and an optional evening sit to close the day. Please bring whatever you prefer for your own sitting practice—be it a cushion, bench or chair.

Sliding-scale Tuition: $950-$1600 Please contact us if money is an impediment to your joining us.

Deposit: $300 The deposit is considered both a sign of as well as financial support for the School for the considerable work done in organizing and enrolling the course. For both these reasons, the deposit is non-refundable unless the program is cancelled. The full fee is due at start of the course.

Letter of Intent: We ask for a letter of intent describing what calls you to this unique desert program. This letter is an important part of your preparation and will serve as an introduction to us that we may best support you.

For more information contact Scott at seberle@sbcglobal.net. Send deposit & enrollment forms to School of Lost Borders, P.O. Box 796, Big Pine, CA 93513. Phone: 760-938-3333. Fax: 760-406-8527.

About the Guides

Scott Eberle has worked as a wilderness guide at the School of Lost Borders since 2003. In this work, he has two special interests. The first is exploring how the symbolic death-and-rebirth dimension of the School’s ceremony is informed by his considerable experience sitting with people who are physically dying. To this end, he and Meredith Little co-created the School’s “Practice of Living and Dying” programs. His second interest is exploring the synergy of having your heart and mind cracked open while sitting alone in the wide expanse of the desert, or while sitting quietly on a meditation cushion. His first book, The Final Crossing: Learning to Die in Order to Live, explored the first interest. He is presently writing a second book, The Red Thread of Story, which weaves together both of these interests, while he seeks to understand why it is we humans tell stories.

Silvia Talavera has been a guide with The School of Lost Borders since 1993. She is a woman of versatility, passion, and humor, inspiring people towards self-empowerment. She brings to her work a nurturing insight, deep compassion and guides and teaches from lived experience enhanced by her love of nature. Silvia is a mother and grandmother and has taken her place in her community as elder and mentor. She also continues to work as a hospice nurse, Reiki master and community educator on hospice and end of life care. Silvia has made it her life-long commitment to guide and support those moving through life transitions, both in nature and at the bedside.