

## Aberdeenshire – The Inver Stone

*Strength has a limit. It is easily measured by the kilo.*

*Character understands that limit is a choice. It is measured in the attempt to hoist again the stone, to try once more.*

*Character is measured on the return.*

The above quote from the book “Of Stones and Strength” captures the ethos of stone lifting in a poignant and reflective statement. Phillip Arnold the producer of “The Silent Realm” wrote these words at the beginning of the visitor book which he supplied for the recording of attempts on the Inver Stone.

Since 1947, Mrs June Richards and late husband Jim have been the keepers of the stone at Inver Cottage and her welcoming approach to all who visit leaves an endearing appreciation which adds to the actual lifting of the stone itself. Situated a short distance from the fabled “Stones of Dee”, the Inver Stone is quite unique in that since the placement of the visitors book by Phillip Arnold, previous lifts recorded in the log may inspire confidence in the upcoming lift.



*The Inver Stone*

What can be written of the Inver Stone that is not already known? As far as ancient history is concerned the Inver Stone appears to fail in the possession of an evidence of antiquity however an examination of the local history, without a sourced written text can still prove an authentic and realistic assertion of the actual age of the stone itself.

The first known lift of the Inver Stone cannot be completely ascertained. It was lifted by many prior to the famous A A Cameron lifting the stone at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Cameron was a notable strongman from Lochaber and his notoriety was such that there is a Strathspey Reel named after him.

It was well known that the stone itself had been used formally at the Inver Hotel as a means for tethering horses. The stone shows evidence of its former use with the obvious hole in its base where a metal ring had been attached. It would appear at first glance that would be as far back as the story goes, but this is not the case.

After the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 the British Government instructed General Wade amongst others to begin constructing Military roads within the Highland region. In 1749 the road from Blairgowrie through Braemar to Crathie was completed and at Crathie the road joined with the Dee road creating a direct link from Aberdeen to Braemar. The modern A93 road from Blairgowrie to Crathie follows the course of this military road which obviously intersected the clachan of Inver.

The Inver Hotel was constructed in 1760 as a coach house on the Aberdeen/Braemar coaching road. The stables for the horses were situated exactly across the road, where the stone presently stands and it would be a reasonable assumption that the stables were built at the same time.

Crathie is derived from the Gaelic “Crauidh – achadb” meaning hard or stony fields. The Geology of the area would tend to confirm this and the “Statistical Account for Scotland” published in 1795 highlights the availability of fertile arable ground which has been unable to be worked due the number of heavy stones. Tethering stones had a tendency to have at one side extremely flat in order that it could lye flush to the ground and there are still many examples, such as at Rowardenan which exemplify this. So why at Inver in 1760 did someone decide that this roundish granite stone would be suitable?



*Tethering Stone at Rowardenan, Loch Lomond – Considerably larger than the Inver Stone as my daughter Claire demonstrates.*

I would not suggest that the well known practicality and astuteness of the Highlander would cause someone to scour the River Dee, lift a heavy water worn stone and drag it to the stable for the purpose of tying a horse to it. I very much think that they would have used the nearest available heavy stone, and as stone lifting was very much on the demise after the

1745 uprising it would seem feasible to utilise this stone as it was no longer in vogue for lifting.

I would conclude that the evidence would point to the Inver Stone being an established and traditional lifting stone well prior to the building of the Inver Hotel in 1760. It could well be the fact that was what tempted A A Cameron to lift it was that there was a local knowledge that the Inver was an ancient traditional stone of strength.

As some may know the father of the great Donal Dinnie was a stone mason who would know the area well. It has been suggested that it was he that inscribed the Inver Stone with its weight, not an easy feat for an amateur and the inscription has clearly been done by the hands of a professional. And if the stone was for tethering horses or whatever ? why weigh it and inscribe its weight?

How old is the Inver Stone? A lot older than it receives credence for.

Within the area of Inver there was a notable strongman who of which very little has been written. Known as Finla of Clan Chattan he was a man herculean proportion and such was his strength that he was commonly called Finla Mor. He was born on the nearby Invercauld Estate and much of his “work” was in dealing with marauders from the west who took liberties with the local people. Finla was known to participate in stone throwing and stone lifting although there are no specific details of his lifting or throwing exploits but is mentioned to perhaps show the interest in stone lifting within the area. Finla died at the Battle of Pinkie Cleugh in 1547.

Like the Stones of Dee the Inver has a great association with David Webster and the Spartan Club of Aberdeen. To promote the Inver Stone and Scottish Stone Lifting the Inver was taken to Glasgow for a promotion. In the early 1960's I sat in the audience at the Kelvin Hall Circus. I must have been 3 or 4 years old and I enjoyed this special treat however the interest of my father was heightened when this large oval stone was brought into the ring and introduced. Some of the best Highland Games athletes of the day were in attendance and the challenge went out to lift it. From that point the art of stone lifting became a focus for P B Martin which resulted in the release of “Of Stones and Strength”.

*Insert picture of Inver Stone at Kelvin Hall*



*The Inver Stone and cottage*

In the summer of 1993 after a climb of seven munros (Scottish Mountains over 3000ft in height) which involved a rough walk of about 16 miles, tired and exhausted we returned to the car parked at Glen Shee. We had a good day on the hill and with time to spare decided on a visit to Inver to say hello to a good friend. We met up with Jim Richards and learned some more history of the stone. The old man straddled the stone, placed his hands under it and began his lift. Bringing it up to waist height he had to release it. The exertion of 9 hours in the mountains had taken its toll but to me it was still a good lift.

In the autumn of 2006 we again returned to Inver. By this time Peter was ravaged with cancer and was feeling extremely negative due to the futility of his illness. We were greeted by Mrs Richards and shared tea with her in the area she puts aside for the records of the Inver Stone Lifts. Beside the record logs was a copy of "Of Stones and Strength" and she asked the old man to autograph the copy. I could see elation in his face and I knew that he felt that in some way, he had become a significant part of the history of the Inver Stone.

Bidding farewell to Mrs Richards, the sun was shining and Peter walked up to the stone and placed hands on it. It was the last time he was to touch a stone of strength having succumbed to the scourge some 7 months later. I do recall that he still felt slightly disappointed that he couldn't lift the stone but I suppose that's the mindset of all stone lifters, regardless of circumstances failure is not an option.

A great deal has been written about various feats involving the Inver Stone. The shape of this 265 pound Cairngorm Granite stone makes it a classic "Clach Utaich" that is a heavy stone lifted into the lap. Whether the Inver Stone was lifted onto a dry stone dyke wall is subject to scrutiny and debate. I do not see a "dry stane" dyke as a form of reception plinth befitting of the Inver Stone and neither were all dyke walls the same height. A double walled dyke would probably have sufficient strength to accept the rigours and pounding of a heavy stone being repeatedly lifted on to it but through time would still suffer damage.

Consequently, a single wall dyke would probably just topple over.

The simplicity of “Ultaich” lifting is that the test is to lift the stone into the lap to complete a successful lift.

The Inver has been lifted overhead on at least six known occasions. Whether all 6 lifts were regarded as a technical overhead press with a full arm lockout is open to those who wish to introduce a natural art to the world of contradiction. Of the lifts available to view on the internet two show variable differences. When Laine Snook lifted the Inver Stone overhead on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2006 the movement of bringing the stone from his lap to shoulder height involved a flip of the stone when, for a moment in time, the stone leaves his grasp while still gaining height and with Laine still in obvious control. The stone was then propelled skyward. As opposed to this lift, Andrew Cairney on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2009 exhibits a true and raw power as he eases the stone well above his head and retains it there.

Both lifts are remarkable feats of strength.

The stone has also been lifted overhead by Hamish Davidson, Bill Kazimier, Francis Brebner and Gregor Edmunds.

It should be noted that when Bill Kazimier pressed the Inver the story of the stone being lifted across the road and placed on the bar counter at the Inver Hotel is purely myth. David P Webster was present to confirm Bill’s historic lift but there was no attempt to carry it to the hotel. A good myth though.

As far as I am aware the offer of a free pint is still available to the first person who achieves this and I am sure that with the increase in strength in today’s athletes there is the possibility of perhaps this challenge being fulfilled.

With regards to lifting the stone, with a horizontal circumference of about 60 inches it is not so difficult to get your arms around the stone. Grip is another matter, what the 265 lb’s worth of Cairngorm Granite will not do is give you an easy grip of its polished surface however at the same time it’s natural grain is sufficient to remove a couple of layers of skin.

The visitor’s book retained by June Richards was commenced in 2005. Although the log is devoid of such names as Bill Kazimier, Steve Jeck, Peter Martin and Randall Strossen among many others, a read of the book lists a who’s who of the stone lifting community and perhaps demonstrates the worldwide appreciation for this classic stone.

To all those on the list and to those who have gone before it would be befitting to use the old Gaelic phrase used to compliment the strength of the individual.

*“Cho laidir ri Cuchulin”*

*(You are stronger than Cuchulin)*

For the benefit of those who have been unable to visit the Inver Stone the log from the visitors book is transcribed below. Hopefully it will inspire anyone reading it to visit and attempt the stone.

Date	Name	Country	Remarks
10.3.05	Bill Crawford	USA	Shouldered 3 times, Dream come true. New England Strength Athletes Scotland Stone Lifting Tour 2005.
10.3.05	Erik Sauve	USA	Shouldered Stone, lifted many times, Great place and great host
10.3.05	Danna Florence	USA	Shouldered first attempt & fourth. Thanks for the best time of my life
<b>2006</b>			
7.5.06	Kenneth Nowicki	Scotland	To chest, shoulder next time
7.5.06	Alec McDonald	Scotland	
7.7.06	John O'Brien	USA	To chest, missed at shoulder, thanks
26.7.06	Mark Brear	England	To just up to my chest best day of my life, so happy
27.7.06	Thomas E Van Veik	USA	This was the highlight of my trip, Thank you
27.7.06	Jim Spalding	USA	To chest what fun
28.10.06	Blyth Stevenson	Scotland	Shouldered once, press position once – not pressing yet!!
28.10.06	Tam Coves	Scotland	High on chest x 2
28.10.06	Tony Aitchison	Scotland	Chest high but pulled Dinnies four times earlier - barehanded
17.11.06	Stan Pike	England	Three at chest height after Dinnie stones
17.11.06	Steve Angel	England	Lifted to chest height after 4 reps on Dinnie Stones
<b>2007</b>			
13.07.07	Mick Cottrell	New Zealand	3 x to chest, one just off
13.07.07	Craig Red	Australia	4 reps and shouldered stone, attempted press unsuccessful
15.07.07	Joe Maccarrone	USA	To shoulder, thank you
08.06.07	Michael Pockoski	USA	Shoulder – Great Stone!
08.06.07	Daniel McKim	USA	Chested, shoulder high, fun
08.06.07	Bert Sorin	USA	Shoulder high. A wonderful stone and country
12.08.07	Roger Davis	England	Humbled 10 years ago, victorious today, the stone hasn't changed – I have.
14.10.07	Ben Voights	USA	Lifted to the chest twice. Fantastic experience, thanks to Mrs Richards for the opportunity.



14.10.07	Gordon Welcott	USA	Lifted to the chest. Held and walked 10 feet – incredible experience
08.12.07	David Welsh	Scotland	Watched Bill Crawford lift the very stone to high chest high several times
08.12.07	Bill Crawford	USA	My old friend is well. The Inver stone lives. Thank you June.
13.12.07	Mathew Waldron - Moir	Australia	X 2 lifts – “Steve Jeck says hello”
<b>2008</b>			
24.05.08	Laine Snook	England	Overhead x 4
10.07.08	Sebastian Went	Poland	
10.07.08	Gregor Edmunds	Scotland	Lifted with Went, he got overhead in rain, very slippery but VG
19.08.08	Bob Russell	England	Lifted to chest
22.09.08	Francis Brebner	Scotland	First time lifted the stone chest height age 19, overhead 1989 3 times
18.10.08	Laine Snook	England	Overhead x 2 , pleased to see the Inver stone again
14.12.08	Laine Snook	England	To chest
<b>2009</b>			
02.01.09	Lance Holland - Keen	Australia	First time lift. Like picking up a ball of ice. To chest just the once.
04.07.09	David Fitzgerald	USA	
20.07.09	Sam Grammer	USA	Shouldered the stone, worth the trip
20.07.09	Dhani Jones		
20.07.09	Gregor Edmunds	Scotland	
01.08.09	Andrew Cairney	Scotland	4 <sup>th</sup> man in history to press the stone. Witnessed, photo and film by Stevie
01.08.09	Stephen Murray	Scotland	
01.08.09	Kenneth Nowicki	Scotland	
29.08.09	Alan Wynne	Scotland	Lifted on 2 <sup>nd</sup> attempt
05.09.09	Robert Troupe	USA	Two lifts to shoulder, a great stone
23.09.09	Conrad Snook	England	Lifted to chest
<b>2010</b>			
09.04.10	Dirk Mertins	Germany	Lifted to chest first try, wasn't easy, I'll be back
09.04.10	Thomas Becker	Germany	Nice land to lift stones
25.06.10	Stan Pike	England	Beautiful stone, lovely people, lift 5 times 58 years old.
25.06.10	Steve Angell	England	3 lifts to chest. Love this stone. Dinnies next
25.06.10	Barry Gibson	England	Lovely people, very deceiving stone. 5 attempts, 1 decent lift
14.12.10	James Grahame	Scotland	Lapped once then 2 stand ups followed by another lap and stand up
<b>2011</b>			
05.02.11	Brandon Verret	USA	Lifted to chest on 2 <sup>nd</sup> try
