

## Aberdeenshire – Glen Quoich (Stone Lifting Site)



*Glen Quoich*

For those that have been fortunate enough to attempt the Stones of Dee and the Inver Stone I am sure you will be well acquainted with the A93 Aberdeen/Braemar Road. Braemar holds a certain significance in Scottish strength athletics due to royal patronage of the local gathering. The first Braemar gathering took place in 1832 however close to the village, and over one hundred years earlier, another gathering took place which incorporated a stone lifting competition involving many men.

The competition was very much an aside to the Jacobite uprising of 1715. This was the first serious attempt to restore the Stewart dynasty to the British throne. The backbone of the raised army was the ferocity, strength and loyalty of the Highlander.

The tale of Glen Quoich is told in *“Tales and memories of Cromar and Canada: Donald Farquharson 19—”*

*“In 1715 this unfortunate Prince, known as “The Pretender,” landed in Scotland, and in the month of September of that year, his standard was raised at Braemar, under the title of James III. In the month of August next preceding that event, the earl of Mar, for the purpose of rousing the clansmen for the support of the prince, had made arrangements for a great deer hunt in the highlands of Braemar, to which representatives of all the clans likely to take part in the rising were invited.*

*Present there was the Earl himself, more than one marquis, and a large number of knights and esquires and their followers, to the number in all of some 1500. Great and small were in the highland dress, each clan distinguished by its peculiar tartan. The rank and file were*

*armed with claymore, dirk and Lochaber axe and with obsolete musket or long-bow. To this rude equipment with the aid of a hundred couples of Irish grey hounds had fallen in a few hours four score deer. These provided venison in abundance for tables which seem to have been loaded with other good things to which the rude clansmen would ordinarily be strangers. Not only was the food supply rich and abundant, but liquor which would not be less acceptable to the natives, seems to have been supplied with liberal hand.*

*Tradition asserts that the party came down to Glen-Quoich where beside the water-fall of the Quoich are "pot holes" worn in the rock in time of flood by stones swirled round and round in a narrow eddying circle. Such a hole, of considerable dimensions, the Earl of Mar determined to make tributary to the interests of the Prince. Into its capacious interior he caused to be poured several anchors of whiskey, some hundredweights of honey and some gallons of boiling water. From the liquor thus compounded, he distributed bumper after bumper to the thirsty and delighted clansmen, whose enthusiasm under such liquid inspiration, so generously bestowed by the hand of a nobleman so affable and condescending, soon became fired to the highest pitch.*



*The Glen Quaich "Punch Bowl"*

*In playful mood, some stalwarts among the Grants of Rothlurcus made exhibition of their prowess by lifting from the ground and almost to their knees a huge block of stone, to the sad discomfiture of some Braemar men who could not lift it from the ground. Standing by, the Earl of Mar and Rothlurcus discussed the prospects of the proposed rising, as to the expediency of which the latter had expressed some doubt. Observing the easy triumph of his men and the humiliation of the men of Mar, Rothlurcus gleefully exclaimed "Do you call these boys men, my Lord? Why, none of them can move that stone that my lads can make a play thing of." The Earl manifested some annoyance, observing which Invercauld walked up to Finlay Farquharson, one of his men, and obtained his consent to try his hand.*

*Finlay not only lifted the stone, but carrying it in his arms, approached His Lordship asking what he would do with it. "Throw it over my horse's neck" was His Lordship's reply. That feat successfully accomplished, Finlay retired as if nothing had happened. The Earl's invitation to Rothimurcus to repeat the feat was not accepted.*

*But Rothimurcus was, nevertheless, with his men, present at the battle of Sheriffmuir. Although myself a loyal Mar man it is only fair to state that another version of the story substitutes for its Farquharson hero Nathaniel Forbes of Daluhandy, who afterwards attained the rank of Captain under Mar."*

The waters of Glen Quaich join the River Dee some miles west from Braemar and it would not be surprising to find water worn granite stones from the same mother as that of the Inver Stone. The text gives some indication as to the possible whereabouts of this stone.

Although the area surrounding the punchbowl, a natural amphitheatre, could well accommodate the 1500 men as stated, there is little of any natural grazing for the horses which would have been in attendance. Some 100 yards due south of the punch bowl at the Linn of Quaich, the land opens out to an expanse of flat grazing land.

Between both points, just off the woodland path sits a rather large granite boulder. Perhaps in the region of over 400 lbs. The story of the stone lifting competition is reputedly true however there could well be an exaggeration so common with these historical tales. There is no knowing whether this was the stone raised by Farquharson, but it is on the same site.



*The Large Glen Quaich Stone*

The stone is obviously water worn but sits some distance higher than the waters of the Quoich. Although there is probably some geological reasoning for its position, the romantics may well wish to believe this stone was plucked from the waters and left where it now stands. Only the strongest of the strong would possess the strength to lift it, perhaps to knee height as mentioned in the text but nether the less, the setting and history is worth it alone just to visit.



In Gaelic Stone Lifting terminology, a stone used in competition is known as “Clach Thogalaich”. If the stone was to be properly named it would be known as –

“Clach Thogalaich Mhor a Glein Quoich” – The Big Competition Stone of Glen Quoich.



*The Large Stone looking south to the Linn of Quoich*

On the west bank of the river, reached by a bridge and forest path, there is a much smaller and far easier stone. At approximately 160lbs on weight, most stone lifting enthusiasts would probably have the strength and ability to press this stone. The stone is curious in that it has a yellow tinge although it is 100% Cairngorm Granite. The stone has a flat underside which would make it ideal for placing on a plinth however its weight would deter serious lifters. The stone is also distinctive in that it forms a pronounced heart shape and on its reverse side has a lip which makes the stone very easy to grip.

As the Clans gathered at this spot, centuries ago, was this stone lifted? It does stand out from the other granite boulders that permeate this site, but again who knows? It's colour would make it an obvious choice.



*The small Glen Quoich Stone*

What is indisputable in history is that there was a gathering of clans at this site and that some form of celebration took place. There is no doubt that there would have been stone lifting and stone putting in abundance while the Highlanders enjoyed the spoils of the forest

and the hospitality of the Earl of Mar. Whatever view you take, the site is not only historic but one of the most scenic in Scotland and is well worthy of a stone of strength. If visiting the Inver Stone, Glen Quoich is a short drive away. Visit and recall the shrill and shouts of Highlanders as they lifted heavy stones. Enjoy and search for any reasonable stone that can be lifted and there are many. There's a chance it may have been lifted nearly 300 years ago. I am reliably informed by David Webster OBE, who is well acquainted with this area, that there was a famous putting stone which once stood outside one of the two houses which are now derelict at the Linn of Quoich. There are many more good putting stones to be found at the Linn where the waters are shallow. Select a stone and throw it about in the vicinity – you will not be the first to have done so but I'm sure it will provide a spectacle for those who access the path for the climbing in the Southern Cairngorm Mountains.



*Cottage at Glen Quoich*

Directions – Glen Quoich is reasonably easy to find. The village of Braemar is reached via the A93 road either from Aberdeen or Perth. On entering the village follow the single through road westwards following the signs for the Linn of Dee.

The road is a loop of the Dee flood plain and it is followed for 10 miles to the Linn of Quoich where the road comes to an abrupt stop. A well defined path beside an information board takes you to the punch bowl in a matter of minutes.

As a cautionary note, the lifter should be aware that the Linn of Quoich is one of the many access routes to the southern Cairngorm Plateau. The Cairngorm Plateau is defined as arctic tundra with a climate similar to that experienced in the Arctic Circle. No matter the time of the year, following the path to the high hills should be left to those with experience.

