

Perthshire and Kinross

Ardvorlich Stone

152kg / 334lb



The Ardvorlich Stone

This stone is not a curio of stone lifting rather it is a curio of history. It is neither well known in stone lifting circles and in addition it also seems to lack any formal written or associated history, making an attempt to explain its inclusion in this book somewhat difficult. However, those that have attempted this “muckle brute” of a stone have left with a deep respect and appreciation of it.

The historic attributes are indeed difficult to ascertain save one important aspect of the placement of stones of strength. Many writers have mentioned that such a stone could be found at the Clan Chief's door or in this case at the entrance to an estate house.

A great stone, which formerly was laid at the gate of a laird in Scotland, and by which he tried the bodily strength of each man in his clan

A Military Dictionary. Lieutenant Colonel William Duane of the United States Army, p.558, 1810

The Ardvorlich Stone - purely by its location -fits well into being an example of a stone of strength laid at the gate of a laird. The occupier of Ardvorlich House is Alexander Donald Stewart of Stewart of Balquhiddy, 15th Laird of Ardvorlich but not

chief of Clan Stewart. The estate has been the ancestral home of the Balquhidder Stewarts for over 400 years.

The Ardvorlich stone is so obviously a test of strength whose lifting history has been long lost. In so far that there are hundreds of such stones situated all over the Highlands of Scotland, this stone is perhaps the best that matches the definitions as laid out above.

Personal knowledge of this stone was simply acquired through many forays in to the Highlands by the late PB Martin and his brother in law (Matt Blaney). In 1989, an early Sunday morning drive took us to Lochearnhead to tackle Ben Vorlich.

Parking on the shores of Loch Earn, we entered Ardvorlich Estate looking for the signed path for hill walkers and there at the beginning of the long driveway that extended to the mansion house was the unmistakable sign pointing south. Sitting proudly beside the marker was a large rounded stone which was more than a decorative ornament. It was a lifting stone. PB Martin approached the stone, no towel to dry the excess moisture from it and no chalk for grip he simply walked up to the stone and lifted it. Pulling it up to his knees the stone could rise no further and that was it for the strength test of the day with a returning focus on clambering up the large hill ahead of us.

Many hours later on returning via the estate we again passed the stone with just a short pause to admire its bulk and with a shake of the head, the old man simply walked on. The time frame is modern, just being over 25 years ago but it was a time before any serious research had been made into lifting stones in Scotland and well before any thoughts on the creation of *Of Stones and Strength*. Why indeed the Ardvorlich Stone failed to feature in the seminal book on Scottish stone lifting is not so much a mystery rather it was a simple omission. One has to consider that at the time of the lift, bringing the stone up to knee height was not considered a lift proper. However, putting it into perspective through the knowledge we have now, anyone who has attempted this stone will simply say it was a remarkable lift.

So there we have the Ardvorlich Stone and although it was later mentioned in a MILO publication, the stone lay there at the entrance to Ardvorlich House, devoid of history and devoid of lifting.



Roger Davis (Eng) and Peter Jenson (Den) putting air underneath the Ardvorlich stone.

Two contrasting styles

Estate workers at Ardvorlich have confirmed the stone as a stone of strength and it is well known that the Stewarts of Ardvorlich were well acquainted with the more famous Puterach at Balquhiddy, indeed one of the ancestors of the present Laird explains the pronunciation of the Puterach. It is more than likely that this branch of the Stewarts has their own testing stone and this is most obviously it.

As expected from most stones of strength, grip or rather the lack of it is a serious issue with this stone. It is exceptionally smooth and being situated in a wooded area it also boasts a layer of algae compounding any attempt at grip. Having an off-set centre of gravity, it is best perhaps to roll and get a feel for the stone first, feel its weight and then attempt grip. The stone requires a thorough examination as preparation and a straight forward lifting attempt without this will likely result in failure.

Since the release of "Of Stones and Strength" the stone has only been budged four times with Peter Jensen (Denmark), Roger Davis (England), Alex Roberts (England) and the late Peter B Martin (Scotland) holding the honours. With more exposure to its existence the stone will someday entice more to test their muscle on this particular stone which has been lifted and put into the lap only once by Alex Roberts.



If visiting this site I would suggest taking the opportunity of viewing a fine example of Highland legal justice. In 1620 AD, a group of MacDonald's of Glen Coe carried out a cattle raid at Ardvorlich. In the skirmish that followed, seven of Clan MacDonald were slain by the Stewarts and their bodies lay in a shallow grave near the loch until their remains were discovered some years later and they were then afforded a decent grave.

A stone marker, situated to the west of the stone bridge and entrance to the estate can easily be identified.



Burial Marker Stone

The inscription on the stone reads – *Near this spot were interred the bodies of 7 McDonalds of Glencoe killed when attempting to harry Ardvorlich Anno Domini 1620.*

Most people visiting the area are totally unaware of this stone, then again most are equally unaware of the stone of strength a short distance away.

Editor – PB Martin would be the first known lift in modern times. I am not certain of the order of subsequent lifts (Peter, Roger, Alex) listed in the article. Since this article several other lifters have achieved air under this stone.

Oldmanofthestones.com