

Old Man of the Stones

Am Bodach a Clachan

This book is dedicated to Peter Martin and our Scottish ancestors.

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Foreword

Preface

An unguarded email from Peter Martin on the 9th July 2013 to Alex Roberts and cc'd to James Grahame, Martin Jancsics and Roger Davis.

Not wanting to put any pressure on yourself, Roger, James and Martin but you guys are the future of traditional stone lifting in this country. Not some trumped up geezer who thinks that because he wears a kilt and lifts the Dinnies (whatever way) and the Inver that he is now some God's gift to traditional lifting but that is how strength culture appears to work and it is for you to tour, talk and work out ways of drawing attention to the stones that retains respect for the culture in which they were lifted. I would encourage as many meets and tours as possible and will assist whatever way possible.

Peter

Peter Martin passed away in September 2015 and was survived by a loving wife and family. He is remembered by many people throughout the world for many different reasons. Readers of this particular book are likely to have shared his interest in the traditional stones of Scotland (and further afield) as well as the culture that spawned them.

He was a stickler for details, facts and figures, which was a clear reflection of his professional life as a police officer. Therefore it was a surprise to some that he had a keen interest in a subject so prone to myth and exaggeration.

During his many years of research and travel, he had amassed a large amount of information which he was slowly crafting in to a book about stone lifting. I was one of several people fortunate to review a very rough draft of it before he passed away.

As part of my commitment to Peter to share the knowledge of traditional stone lifting, I have combined information from a number of sources to produce this book. It's collected from his numerous articles; our personal emails over several years; an early draft of his book on Gaelic strength culture, and my own personal research. This has been further supplemented with contributions from several other people who have expert knowledge to share.

Some of Peter's articles have been reproduced here with very few changes, other than some reformatting. Others have been significantly changed as they were superseded by new information which he had yet to publish online. I often left the supposed weights of the stones in the articles even though they have subsequently been weighed. The accurate weights are at the top of each article.

The intention is to produce a single volume targeted towards stone lifters across the world. Peter was well aware that many stone lifters focus on the weight of the stone

and its location to the exclusion of all other information. Peter wanted to share so much more than that rude information with people. He wanted to share the history and culture that lead to the existence of these stones. Nothing disappointed him more than someone lifting, and then dropping, an historic stone and bragging about it.

Peter wrestled with the need to share the stone lifting culture before the knowledge died out, yet he saw that message being corrupted by the behaviour of some people when they received it.

Peter's mind was constantly churning through the relationship between the traditional stones, the culture that spawned them, and the men that lifted them. It wasn't easy for him to transplant this understanding to a modern lifter who has been raised with a modern sporting mindset (which is entirely different).

It is inevitable that any given book would reflect the author's mindset and I am sure Peter's book would have had some strong opinions and themes. Unfortunately, I can't know exactly how Peter's book would have looked when it was published as the draft I received was very raw.

Therefore, I have tried to write without expressing personal opinions or bias in the main body of the book. I have selected the information I thought Peter would have used. For practical reasons I have often excluded detailed directions to the stones mentioned. These are provided in a better format on the oldmanofthestones.com website which is dedicated to Peter's research.

However, I am willing to share some personal thoughts on the relationship between the historic stones and the men who lift them, so that people can understand some of the decisions I made in the process of creating this book.

It's fair to say we both had strong opinions on stone lifting, which was to be expected in people who had thought and read their way towards their viewpoints over several years. My thoughts were similar but not identical to Peter's. It was inevitable that long car journeys towards historic stones would spawn some interesting conversations.

Personally, I have always been drawn to the simplicity and permanence of the challenge posed by traditional manhood stones. For me, they contain a detergent power which clears my mind of the detritus of modern living. The journey to the stone, the lift itself, and the trip home are all the ingredients of a wonderful day for me.

There are so many ways to develop and display physical strength in modern society, yet few people choose to test themselves against traditional stones. Even fewer, visit the stones in the dark days of winter. Those with only summer-memories of long days of sun and light come away feeling they have left a little bit of paradise behind. However, the exceptional few who lift in the winter months have walked an entirely

different path. They alone are exposed to the full harshness of a Scottish winter. The cold blast of northern winds and the feeling of frozen fingers on stone are their memories alone.

The sounds of Scotland, in all her moods, are never far from the ears of a genuine stone lifter.

These outliers of society come from a variety of strength sports such as Strongman, Powerlifting, Weightlifting and Bodybuilding. This immense variety makes it unwise to write of them as anything but intensely individual athletes.

Sometimes stone lifters are referred to collectively as the *Brotherhood of Stone*. However, I dislike this term and avoid using it for the reasons given above. I would suggest a more accurate way of viewing the relationship between *lifter* and *stone* as follows: - all of Scotland's stones belong to a vast family of lifters many of which are dead; a few are living, and countless numbers unborn.

Some might think the history of stones would be dull. Nothing could be further from the truth. Read on.

Scotland

Aberdeenshire

Bennachie – Esson Stone

Weight unknown

Editor – Peter did not have an article for this stone. What follows is pieced together from a series of emails and contact I had with local bailies.



Fred Gordon with the only known picture of the Esson Stone.
Notice the metal ring in Fred's left hand.

Bennachie is a range of hills in Aberdeenshire and was the home to a community of squatters. They lived a crofting life and performed skilled work such as dyking. A number of them were stone masons.

The family that continued to live on the former colony was as mentioned above, the Esson's. Some of them were noted for their physical strength. They possessed a large boulder with a ring on it, a lifting stone, which they used to practice for the heavy events in the local games. According to Smith it was as formidable as the Dinnie Stones.

Bennachie Colony House Excavation 1999 An Extended Report NQ Bogdan, Dr PZ Dransart, T Upson-Smith and J Trigg with contribution by J MacKay, p.15, 1999.

The photograph below is of George Esson, the last of the Bennachie squatters. He died in 1939. His family had their own lifting stone (from at least 1801) which was located outside the door of their croft at *Boghead of Tullos* on the SE slopes of the hill



Left:. Esson Croft



Right: George Esson

The stone was known to be located at The Esson Croft until circa 1993. It is one of very few known traditional ringed-stones in Scotland.

Bervie Stone

The servant of Mr William Beattie struck a stone with his plough. When taken out of the ground it was found to be blue in colour and heavy for its size. Mr Beattie then offered 2s 6d to any farm servant living in the parishes of Benhold and Garvock who could lift the stone within 6 weeks of the challenge being issued.

Mr Joseph Brown (farmer) and one his servants are excluded as they were involved in arranging the challenge. Mr Brown's servant has been able to lift the stone easily

No others had succeeded.

Morning Post, Saturday, February 22nd, 1851

Crawford Putting Stone

336lb/152kg (Documented as such but not weighed to my knowledge).



The Crawford Putting Stone, also known as *Mauns Stone*, *the Devils Putting Stone*, *Crawee Stane* or *the Crawstan* is a strange test of strength due to its alleged lifting history.

To the east of New Deer in Aberdeenshire, Fedderate Castle, was once the former home of the Crawford family. Although it cannot be established when this imposing castle was constructed, it is known that a William Crawford extended it between 1474 and 1519 when the surrounding land was a wet bog and the castle was protected by a moat. The Crawford family held the local barony for some 200 years or so however no one is certain how the Crawford's imposed their strength in this area, which is rather distant from the traditional homelands in the south. Regardless, the Crawford's lost the lands of Fedderate circa 1570, primarily due to debt with the last Baron being known as *Manse Crawford*.

The story of the stone is thus

It is said that at one time a certain Manse Crawford was laird of Fedderat, a very wicked and tyrannical man, who was always vaunting of his great strength. Never a man in all the land could match him at putting the stone and other feats of strength. One day a horseman came over the Cunnie Knowe and down the road. When opposite the Castle he dismounted, took up a boulder which lay at the side of the road, and flung it a good bit away from the track, mounted his horse, and rode away down the road in the direction of Fisherford. Manse was looking out of the Castle and saw the feat. He immediately sallied out and tried to fling back the stone. In his desperate efforts to do so he broke his eye strings and was ever afterwards blind. When the people in the district went to examine the stone they found it covered with

the impressions of a man's fingers and thumbs. No doubt then remained that the Devil, for such it must have been, had taken this means to lure the Laird to ruin.

The stone lay there for ages, no one being ever able to throw it back, though many tried. When land got to be of more value the tenant had it rolled to the road-side, as people going to look at it trampled down his crops. It lay there until it was forgotten by all but a few, and was latterly built into the inside of a dyke along the road leading from Maud to Cuminestown, where it now lies.

It is an oblong yellow quartzite boulder, of a few cwt's, polished as smooth as glass and covered on both sides with semicircular indentations, pretty much like the marks of a man's thumb in any soft substance, more especially if the nails be long, a quality that the Devils was said to have. Little wonder that, in a superstitious age, when men could not trace out natural causes, these indentations were regarded as finger marks of supernatural beings.

Scottish Notes and Queries Volume 2, No 5, p.65-66, 1888

Folklore and truth occasionally intertwine and there are good reasons for the stone being associated with the Devil. Long held belief systems, particularly in Gaelic and Scottish culture, attributed just about anything that went wrong, as an act of the Devil himself.

The demise of the Fedderate branch of the Crawford Clan coincides with the rise of Presbyterianism in Scotland, staunch in attitude towards anything seen as a Catholic past-time or Paganism, stone lifting - among many other athletic exercises - was vehemently despised by the Church of Scotland to prevent any "fun" on the day of worship. The Crawford Putting Stone and its story may well have been a story conjured up as a warning against stone lifting more than anything else and it is curious that the demise of the stone itself, in that it was built into a stone dyke wall, so mirrors the demise of the more famous Puterach stone at Balquhiddier, a lifting stone that was disposed of on the instructions of the Parish Minister.

Another version of the story infers an association with Clan Lindsay which in this context is known to be completely erroneous.

Another tradition (of which there are several versions extant) has reference to the "Crawee Stane" - Crawee being a corruption for "Crawford." The most correct version is that one of the Lindsays, known as "Mauns" was looking over the Castle wall and observed an ill-looking "crooked carle" coming up the howe. The said "crooked carle" is reported to have stopped at the Crawee Stane, (which was then used as a landmark), and taking up the gigantic mass like a pebble, hurled it forward two or three hundred yards. The story goes on to relate that this feat, having been observed by Mauns, he immediately resolved to try his strength alongside of his strange-looking visitor. Challenging the "crooked carle," he asked him if he thought no other body but himself could lift the "Stane" - which brought out the retort that he at least could not do it. Mauns now proceeded to his trial of strength, resolved, to punish the

"carle" for his insolence. The "Stane" however, was obdurate; and in one determined attempt to lift it, the laird is said to have "broke the strings of his eyes, and burst himself."

Immediately upon the occurrence of this catastrophe, it is recorded that the "crooked carle" transformed himself into his true shape - that of Beelzebub - and whisked off the laird among a shower of sparks and sulphurous flame. The "Crawee Stane" has been preserved, and may now be seen in one of the dykes on the farm of Fedderate, now in the occupation of Mr Forbes.

The Howes of Buchan. William Anderson, p.91, 1873

In 1936, the stone was rediscovered during road-widening activities between Loanhead and Mains of Fedderate. The foreman (Mr. Booth) rediscovered the stone embedded in the dyke and called upon a local man to identify it.

Local man, Mr. Fowlie, was subsequently able to identify the stone as being the original one he remembered from many years earlier (Aberdeen Press and Journal, Antiquarian Find at New Deer, p.6, 24th March, 1936).

Although the stone has so much association with Fedderate Castle it unfortunately no longer resides at this location. The stone is currently located at the entrance to March Farm near Bonnykelly.



Remains of Fedderate Castle



Ordnance Survey Map, Six-inch To the Mile, Aberdeenshire, Sheet XIII showing the location of the Maun's Stone

Dinnie Steens

History of the Dinnie Stones

The Dinnie Steens represent a famous feat of strength and a non-trivial part of Dinnie's legacy amongst the global strength community. They are a pair of stones he lifted and carried across the width of a bridge in 1860. He was neither the first nor the last to lift them, but his lifting of them is so well known that the stones now bear his name. The stones weigh in at 188kg/144kg (414lb/318lb) respectively.



Courtesy of Martin Jancsics

On the granite stone bridge that crosses the River Dee at Potarch there were, and still are, two large stones weighing about 8 cwt. The pair, placed in a recess. In the early 'thirties massive iron rings were placed in them, to which ropes were fixed so that scaffolds could be attached for pointing the bridge. Now, one of these stones was somewhat heavier than the other. Very few strong men of that day could lift the heavy one with both hands, but my father could raise one in each hand with apparent ease, and could throw the heavier stone of the two on to the top of a parapet wall of the bridge.

One (sic) one occasion, I have been told, he took one stone in each hand and carried them both to the end of the bridge and back – a distance of 100 yards. This achievement has been pronounced the greatest feat of strength ever performed in Scotland.

Those two stones are still on the bridge and I myself lifted one in each hand on many occasions, and one market day I carried them across the bridge and back, some four to five yards. I did not, however, attempt to go to the end of the bridge, as my father had done.

Health and Strength, The Life and Feats of Donald Dinnie, Told by himself and others, November 30, 1912.

Bridge

Saturday 7th October 1911 The Weekly Scotsman, p.11 states that rings were placed in the stones at the beginning of the 1830s. This was for *fixing ropes, on which hung the scaffolds*.

The work was started in November 1811 and officially completed around 1813/14, depending on how you define *completed*.

David Webster

No one alive today saw Dinnie lift the stones. Everyone has to rely on information from letters, books, newspapers and oral tradition.

The quotation at the start of this chapter is often cited as the first mass broadcast of the feat of strength by Dinnie and his father. It appeared in a magazine in 1912, four years before his death. It was famously repeated in Davie Webster's *Superstar* book and subsequently copied-and-pasted ad infinitum on the internet.

The salient points to note are that the stones had been in place for decades by the time this article was published in 1912. It also states that there had already been multiple attempts at individual lifts and also at least one lift-and-carry by Donald's father. Donald's attempt was in public and at a local fair.

It is lesser known that the Weekly Scotsman had an article pre-dating the *Health and Strength* one by four years.

There are two stones at the inn of Potarch, Deeside, used for slinging the scaffolding to when painting the bridge. For nearly a century now every strongman, professional or otherwise, passing that way has had a try at them. They are boulders from the bed of the river, and it is a fairly good test of one's muscle to move one of them with both hands in one ring. The writer has seen Donald lift them, one in each hand, and clink them first in front and then behind him, but his father could lift them up, one in each hand and carry them across the bridge and back again.

The Weekly Scotsman, August 1908.

Once again, the salient points here are that the author of the article says he personally witnessed Dinnie lift the stones. Although, the description is ambiguous regarding what is meant by *clink*. It also states that the stones were in situ for a century already and a known challenge for anyone passing who wanted to make an attempt at lifting them.

An extensive search was undertaken with the assistance of the *Reference Services of The National Library of Scotland (Edinburgh)* to identify the Author of this article and hence establish the name of the witness to Donald picking up the steens. Unfortunately, it was unsuccessful at the time of going to print. We were however able to confirm that a name and address was mandatory for all articles but that such details were not printed publically. Attempts to contact the Scotsman directly did not receive a reply.

The confusion begins in the decades that follow Donald Dinnie's death as his feat of strength is corrupted in the retelling. It was originally a lift-and-carry of two stones across the *width* of a bridge but quickly becomes confused with a similar feat

performed by his father, Robert. The distances also become exaggerated with every decade that follows.

The summary below can be shown to track the growing confusion between the feats of strength performed by Robert and Donald and how, through the passage of time, they have become interwoven.

Date	Quotation	Reference	Key Points
1908	The writer has seen Donald lift them, one in each hand, and clink them first in front and then behind him, but his father could lift them up, one in each hand and carry them across the bridge and back again.	The Weekly Scotsman, August, 1908.	Eyewitness account of Donald's lift in newspaper. Robert Dinnie carried both across the bridge and back.
1912	Those two stones are still on the bridge and I myself lifted one in each hand on many occasions, and one market day I carried them across the bridge and back, some four to five yards. I did not, however, attempt to go to the end of the bridge, as my father had done.	Health and Strength, The Life and Feats of Donald Dinnie, Told by himself and others, November 30, 1912.	Donald Dinnie's words. Donald carried them across bridge. Robert Dinnie carried to end of bridge .
1916	The Aberdeen Journal, 10 th March 1916, p.9, informs its reader that Donald Dinnie lifted and carried a large stone across a stream after he had beheld the futile efforts of a local strongman to move the stone.	The Aberdeen Journal, 10 th March 1916, p9.	A single stone carry of the larger stone across a stream by Donald Dinnie. Does not say through a stream , which would be absurd.
1927	The Scot was determined to see for himself the strength of this French-Canadian and after demonstrating his pet stunt with one of the stones he challenged the giant to do likewise. Cyr grasped the ring in the same manner as Dinnie and lifted it with ease. Not only did he carry it as far as Dinnie had done, but he exceeded the distance.	The Strongest Man That Ever Lived by George Jowett.	A myth, which has unfortunately been repeated for decades. Debunked later in this book.
1943	His father was a mason and a builder,	The Sunday	Says Robert Dinnie

	and Donald worked with him. He could single handed lift and place granite slabs of half a ton. Once he carried across the River Dee a huge boulder that no other man could lift.	Post 25 th July 1943.	(not Donald) carried boulder across the river. The exact opposite was claimed in 1916 (above).
1954	Dinnie is supposed to have carried the two stones from the hotel, up the road and over the bridge.	Evening Express, Tuesday, Oct 5 th , p4.	Exaggeration and not claimed in original documents in 1908/1912.
1954	Declares Henry Gray as being the first man to carry the Dinnie stone (3cwt plus) since Donald Dinnie himself.	Aberdeen Evening Express of the 12 th October.	Single Stone focus.
1954	This stone, weighing three hundred-weight, has been lifted and carried with one hand only by the great Dinnie himself. It is said he carried it and another weighing four hundred-weights a distance of 80 yards.	The Courier and Advertiser, Saturday, Oct 30 th , 1954.	Exaggeration and not claimed in originals documents in 1908/1912.

It is not uncommon for an original event to be confused in its retelling and the Dinnie Steens would appear to be a classic example of this. There is no doubt that the two stones were lifted-and-carried by Dinnie and that it was an event witnessed by many others in a public place. It was not questioned during his lifetime even by his most avowed critics.

Dinnie was alive for eight more years after the newspaper report in 1908 and his claim to performing this feat of strength in 1860 was never questioned or doubted during his lifetime. This includes his son Edwin (who sued him regarding other matters) and also his ever-critical brother-in-law, William McCombie Smith. It is worth remembering that Dinnie and McCombie Smith argued publicly over several weeks regarding a discrepancy of ½ " in a throw credited to a third party. It is inconceivable that McCombie Smith would not challenge Dinnie's claim to this feat if any doubt surrounded it.

Thankfully, the feat of strength was eventually returned to its origins by the 1970's. In 1973, Belfast Policeman, Jack Shanks performed a lift-and-carry of the two stones to replicate the original feat of strength performed by Donald Dinnie. He travelled 17' in a series of smaller lift-and-carries.

The original feat of strength by Donald Dinnie was to lift-and-carry the stones across the width of the bridge. This is the feat of strength that modern lifters should attempt to emulate.

The recent concepts of timed-holds and repetitions are not in keeping with Donald Dinnie or the stones which now bear his name. He never claimed such lifts.

In any discussion of the Dinnie Steens, it is invaluable to retain knowledge of exactly what was stated in the 1908/1912 articles from Dinnie himself and eyewitnesses, rather than on subsequent retellings by others which have introduced unfortunate mistakes and misunderstandings.

Bill Bangert

Bill Bangert (1924 – 2011) was one of the more colourful characters to be smitten with the Dinnie Stones. He was a man of apparently inexhaustible energy in both sport and business.

He is well known as the two-time Mayor of Berkeley, Missouri. He also founded and presided over the tiny municipality of Champ (West St. Louis County). In addition, he possessed an enviable baritone voice and once considered a career in the opera.

He was a multi-discipline athlete and only a few of his notable performances are mentioned here. In field sports, he was the National Intercollegiate Discus Champion in 1944 and 1945 and the AAU Shot Put Champion in 1944, 1945 and 1946.

An excellent amateur boxer, he made it to the final of the Chicago Golden Gloves Tournament of Champions in 1949.

In 1951 he went blind due to retinal phlebitis – haemorrhaging of veins in the retina. This left him without sight in the left eye and only slight light perception in the right.

Undaunted, he continued to compete in field events and in 1952 he participated (blind) in the National AAU Shot Put Championship at [Madison Square Garden](#)

‘I can’t see a thing’ he said, ‘I’ll have someone with me in New York to help me. Once, I’m assured I’m headed in the right direction I don’t have much

trouble with the shotput. I think I can keep from fouling’ (Albuquerque Journal, 31st January, 1952, p14)



Braemar, 1972

He remains the only blind athlete to ever compete in an all-sighted championship of any kind at the Madison Square Garden. It is almost universally reported that he finished 2nd at this competition. However, the results were (1st) Jim Fuchs 56’ 3 1/8”, (2nd) Bernie Mayer, (3rd) Stan Lampert, and (4th) Bill Bangert with 52’ 10 1/4”. (Valley Morning Star, 17th February, 1952, p8).

By May 1952, doctors were using an experimental oxygen treatment to try and restore his sight. This therapy was combined with an operation which resulted in some restoration of sight in one eye.

On the 23rd May, 1952 Bill competed against the world record holder Jim Fuchs in New York. Bill tossed the 16lb ball 55' 2" to take 1st place from Jim, whose best effort was 54' 11 ½ ". At this time Fuchs was the world record holder with a throw of 58' 10 ½ ".

Bill retained serious ambitions to qualify for the USA Olympic Team. In the 1952 season he posted a best competition effort of 56' 5 ¾", which was one of the better marks in the USA that year. Ultimately, he did not qualify and the Olympic team and the places were occupied by Darrow Hooper 17.41m (57' 1 ¼ "), Parry O'Brien 17.38m (57' ¼") and Jim Fuchs 17.36m (56' 11 ¼ ").

In 1968, Bill began competing in the Highland Games in Scotland. He made memorable appearances at Aboyne and Braemar that year.

At Aboyne he was third in the 22lb stone, behind Arthur Rowe and Bill Anderson. He was last in the heavy hammer

A few days later at Braemar, he again took third place in the shot put event. However, he was most noted for falling on his bottom while attempting the Caber – much to the delight of the Duke of Edinburgh in the royal pavilion.

While not ever challenging the established throwers, Bill enjoyed the Games and the crowd warmed to him immediately. In preparation for future visits, he placed an order with Stewart & Co Ltd for a dozen shot put stones weighing 16lb, 22lb and 28lb to be shipped to the USA for use there.

By 1971, reports appear in the press regarding Bill's desire to have *another go at lifting both Dinnie stones together – and carrying* (The Press and Journal, May 24th, 1971, p8). His ambition was to make his attempt in June, around the same time as the Caber World Championships which were in Aberdeen that year.

To add spice to the whole affair, Bill bet the Lord Provost of Aberdeen, John F Smith a *wee dram* that he would emulate the Dinnie feat.

It was also noted that Bill had been perfecting a foolproof method of carrying the stones. It was described as a *harness around his waist rigged to a 150 year old wagon wheel lifting platform* (Daily Keokuk, Iowa, May 26th 1971)

Although, the harness was reported in the USA it appears that this apparatus was unknown to the Scots. Upon his arrival in Scotland, Bill would not reveal his *secret* to the waiting press.

Sunday 13th June, 1971 at 3pm.



The attempt was made on Sunday June 13th and Bill carried the stones across the width of the bridge and back – using the harness – in 12 seconds.

Of his attempt he stated

I only did it to prove it was a fact and not legend.

It's a matter of mechanics. The trick is to move it without having to bend your limbs, putting the load on the biggest bones and muscles and walking in an upright position.

Columbia, Missourian, June 18th 1971, p3.

Sydney Strachen from the Banchory Powerlifting club replicated the feat the same day using Bill's harness and took 23 seconds. (The Press and Journal, June 15th 1971, p.5).

Syd was quoted as saying

It is impossible to carry them without a harness. Anybody who has lifted them will agree that it is humanly and mechanically impossible to walk with them between the legs.

The only possible way to lift both the stones, said Mr Strachan, is with one in front of the legs and the other behind, and in this position it is absolutely impossible to walk

I firmly believe that he didn't walk across the bridge without some contraption of some kind.

The Press and Journal, June 15th 1971,p5.

The harness-carry was not universally well-received. In some reports it was described as *controversial* (The Press and Journal, 22nd July, 1971, p9). A typical comment appeared in the Press and Journal shortly afterwards, which captured the mood of some.

Although quite credible it was no extraordinary feat of strength and would have been fun to a professional strongman... To lift and carry the stones by hand is quite a different matter.

The Press and Journal, 24th June, 1971, p10



Left: Bill adjusting the oxygen used in treating the issues with his eyesight (Dubuque, Telegraph Herald, May 9th 1952)

Right: George Smith making shot-put stones to be shipped to USA, Evening Express, Oct 2nd 1968

Glen Lui – Clach Thogalaich Gleann Laoigh Beag

82kg/180lb

Knowledge of this stone and its location comes to us from the retelling of an incident in 1715 between the Earl of Mar and Grant of Rothiemurchus. Prior to the battle of Sheriffmuir in November 1715, the Earl of Mar mustered his troops in the area surrounding Glen Lui. While waiting for the assemblage of Highlanders from near and far to arrive, an impromptu stone lifting competition ensued.



Stone at Glen Lui

A Giant of Old.

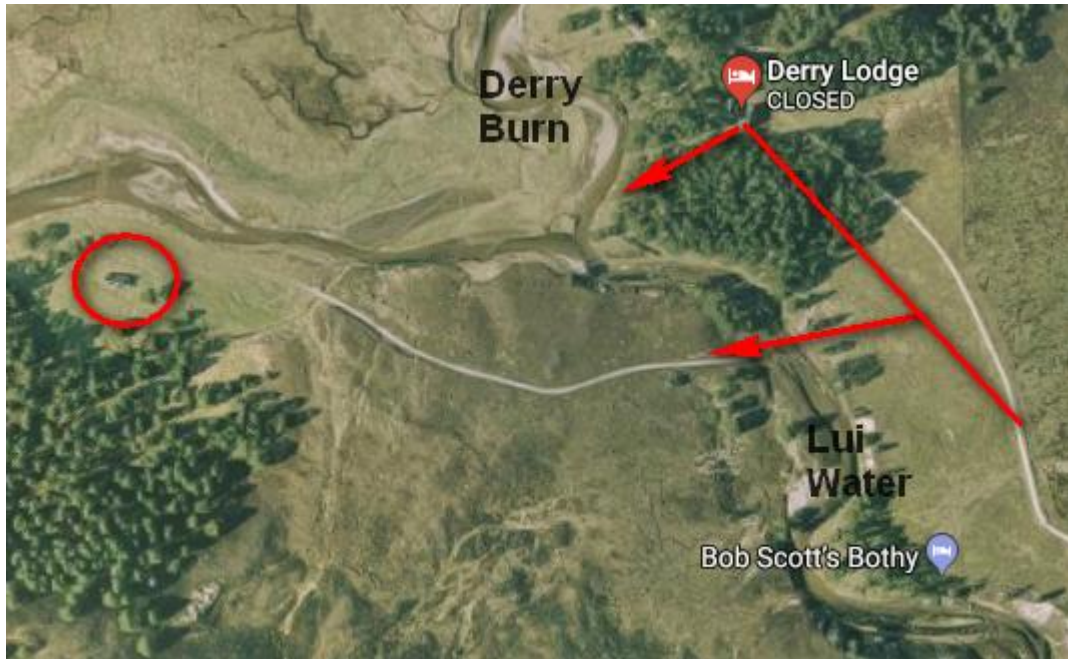
A few hundred yards beyond the stalker's house at Luibeg a large stone lies on the grass below the track and near the burn. This is the tradition connected with it as it is still held in the Braes of Mar:—The men of Rothiemurchus—it may have been the Grants or their predecessors, the Shaws—had been across in Mar lending their aid to the Earl of Mar and his clansmen. They were returning to Aviemore, by way of the Lairig, being accompanied part of the way by the men of Mar. Rothiemurchus, in order to prove to the Earl the strength of one of his men, pointed to a large stone beside the path, and called upon one of his followers to lift it, which he did with ease. But Mar was able to go one better. He had with him a giant of a man, Fionlaidh Mor by name, and requested him to lift the stone, which he did as a man of lesser strength might raise a pebble. Holding it lightly in his hands, he requested his chief to give him further instructions as to its disposal. "Throw it across the neck of the pony which stands over yonder," said the Earl. This Fionlaidh Mor did, to the astonishment of the men of Rothiemurchus, who found none amongst their number even to approach so astounding a feat.

The Scotsman, Wednesday, September 17, Page 8, 1924. Article by Seton Gordon

...there is a Clach Thogalach, i.e. lifting stone, near the junction of the Luibeg and the Derry

The place-names of Aberdeenshire. William McCombie Alexander, p. 322, 1952

The stone is located near the Old Gamekeeper's Cottage, at the junction of the Derry Burn and Lui Water.



Location of the stone



Old Keeper's Cottage

Peter made multiple trips before finding the stone with the assistance of a local historian. He typically drove to the Linn of Dee carpark. Then it's approximately one hours walk (roughly north) to the stone. Depending on the water level he forded it physically in one of two places (indicated by the red lines). The Old Gamekeeper's cottage is indicated by the red circle. The stone is approximately 100yards northwest of the cottage by Peter's reckoning.



Left: The walk to the Stone, Glen Lui



Right: Peter Robert, first known lift in 300 years

Glen Quoich – Lifting Site



Glen Quoich

Once again, knowledge of this location comes from an incident that took place while troops were mustered here for the Jacobite uprising in 1715.

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 Rothimurcus 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 Rothimurcus 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, Rothimurcus 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.”

Tales and Memories of Cromar and Canada. Donald Robert Farquharson, p.25, 1846.

When exploring the location, a particular stone was especially notable.



The Large Glen Quaich Stone, located near the *Punch Bowl*. Roughly 181kg/400lbs.

The stone pictured 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 never 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

Further exploration, on the west bank of the river, reached by a bridge and forest path, revealed a stone of approximately 160lbs in weight. The stone has a curious yellow tinge despite being 100% Cairngorm Granite. It also has a flat underside which would make it ideal for placing on a plinth.



The small Glen Quoich Stone

Although, it is unclear if these two stones were lifted, there is no dispute that there was a gathering of clans at this site. 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.

Editor – An astute reader will notice similarity between the origin stories of the stone at Glen Lui and the lifting-site at Glen Quoich. Both refer to a stone being lifted and thrown over the neck of a small garland pony. Both stories also refer to known locations which remain accessible to this day.

It was a situation that Peter was continuing to investigate. However, he was finding that further research tended to find even more stones E.g. The Glentanner stone is mentioned below in the same text that referred to the Glen Lui stone.

In Glentanner there was one near the head of the Boonie, which cannot now be identified. Perhaps the best known specimen is at Inver, Crathie, across the road from the inn; it is still used occasionally for a trial of strength.

The place-names of Aberdeenshire. William McCombie Alexander, p. 322, 1952

It is possible that stones were lifted at both locations (Glen Lui and Glen Quoich) and history has corrupted the stories over time.

Inver Stone

Crathie

120.4kg / 265lb



The celebrated Inver Stone

The Inver Stone is certainly the most celebrated of traditional lifting stones and is well known throughout the worldwide strength community. There are far older stones than the Inver and indeed there are stones that are far heavier. Regardless, the Inver still retains an aura of mysticism that draws many to it. As a consequence of so many lifts, by those whose culture is foreign, some absurd assumptions have been made about the stone.

For many in the world of strength, physically lifting the Inver stone is of far more importance than the history of it. However, if devoid entirely of its history, would the lifter be there in the first instance?

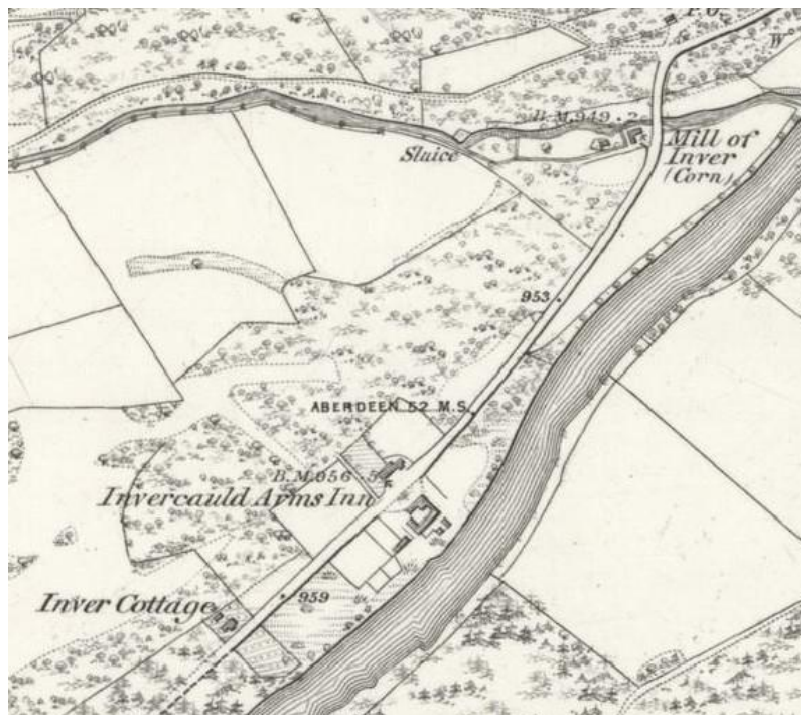
The history of the Inver Stone is practically non-existent and unlike many other traditional lifting stones, it is totally devoid of a Gaelic name which suggests it is not ancient.

After the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, the British Government instructed General Wade to construct military roads within the Highland region. In 1749 the road from Blairgowrie through Braemar to Crathie was completed. This military road passed through the small hamlet of Inverardar, which is now known as Inver. (The Place-names of Aberdeenshire, William M Alexander, p302, 1952.)

The modern A93 road from Blairgowrie to Crathie follows a very similar course.

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 from where the stone presently stands.

What is not commonly known is that, The Inver Hotel was known initially as the Invercauld Arms and has also been known as the Invercauld Inn



OS 1892- 1905 six inches to one mile map of Inver & surrounding area

The Victorian map above shows the Invercauld Arms Inn (aka Inver Hotel) with a stable complex opposite. Inver Cottage is seen to be a completely separate dwelling far from its present location but attention should be drawn to the Mill of Inver.



The Inver stone is occasionally presumed to be a *Tethering* stone for horses. This can be dismissed when the Inver stone is compared to a genuine Tethering stone such as the one at Rowardennan Hotel, Drymen, Scotland. Note the mobile phone on top for scale.



Mill of Inver, circa 1898

Weighing standards in Aberdeenshire prior to 1820 were extremely fickle and significant variations between areas quite were common. Trade and barter was confusing and people could not guarantee what weight or volume they were buying. This was the primary reason for an introduction of the imperial weight measurement system. At this time, the principle larger weight measurement was the Aberdeenshire Boll.

The Boll of it seldom exceeds 17 stones when correctly measured by an Aberdeen firlo; which is about 15 stones and a quarter to the Linlithgow boll. It was seldom so

light as 18 stones 30 years ago. In the year 1782, the stipend bear paid to the Reporter was above 19 stones.....in 1779 this stipend bear weighed 19½ stones.

A General View of the Agriculture of Aberdeenshire. George Keith, p.249, 1811.

Editor – 19 stone is 266lb. The figure '265' is carved on the Inver stone.

It has to be understood that the weights of the period were subject to much fluctuation but it is certain that the Mill of Inver worked on the same rather confusing dictates of measurement and with the Inver Stone certainly within the parameters of what could be considered an Aberdeenshire Boll, everything seems to point at the stone being used as weight for the purchase of corn. The indented section at the bottom of the stone, with the probability of an iron ring attachment would certainly tend to corroborate this however remember there **is also a difference of 3 lbs (in addition to the weight of the ring handle) to account for.**

In addition to a confusing variety of standards of determining volume and weight, there remained the scope for deliberate trickery.

At this time, there are the numerous written reports of Excise men making unannounced visits to check standard 56lb weights only to find standards not being adhered to and weight being either attached - or taken away - from the standard.

This of course depends whether you are buying or selling and in the case of buying corn at Inver, **an additional 3lbs plus weight of handle would over sometime be more financially beneficial to the miller at Inver.**

To make the subject more confusing it should be noted that there was an abortive attempt to incorporate a standard weighing system throughout Great Britain after the Act of Union in 1706. From this there are different weights of imperial pounds relative to the Aberdeenshire Boll and the following text relates to the weight measurement in use on that very same track where the Inver Stone sits and is dated early 18th Century.

They had a division into stages, where refreshment could be got for man and beast at 'Change Houses', as they were called. Bawbee ale was brewed, that is ale sold at ½ d a bottle, but they brewed also penny ale, and at most of them a glass of smuggled gin could be got. The great goods traffic from the north was carried on horses and panniers. The load was equal to two bolls of meal or 256lbs.

Old Highland Roads. The Transaction of the Gaelic Society of Inverness
Volume 14, p.181, 1888

In two completely different time frames, the corresponding weight of the Inver Stone is extremely close to the localised weight measurements although realistically, don't expect them be too exact. All evidence certainly points to the stone being used in

this fashion, a weight to measure corn but as stated, this probably occurred more likely over a shorter period of the stones history.

Of course the Inver Stone by virtue of its beautifully symmetric shape was fashioned by the work of the nearby River Dee and it would be churlish to think that such a stone was searched for and when found, simply removed from the waters to provide a local standard in weight for the purchase of corn. In all probability, the stone was so removed as a test of strength with its use as an agricultural weight occurring far later in its history.

Although the history of the stone is rather indirect and circumstantial in nature, it is all underpinned by the three major factors of Inver itself, ancient track, Inn and Mill because that just about sums up the locale. There wasn't anything else in the surrounding area that would contribute to the location of a testing stone at Inver.

Where this all leads to is a simple dating of the stone as being circa 17th Century or before.

It is exceedingly difficult to view the history of a lifting stone in different time frames and it is obvious that for a period, the Inver stone did well have some form of commercial use as weight measurement but yet it is a lifting stone and always has been. Its lifting during the Victorian period is well known but rest assured it was only lifted then as a consequence of being a traditional lifting stone of age.

Time Frame	Location	Use	Communication
20th Century till present	Outside Inver Cottage	Lifting Stone	Motor Road
1820 to beginning of 20th Century	Outside Stables of Inver Inn	No longer a weight measurement – lifting stone	Track for Horse & Carriage (improved)
1760 to 1820	Outside Stables of Inver Inn	Used to measure Boll of meal *	Track for Horse & Carriage (Military standard)
Up to 1715	Outside ancient shebeen	Lifting Stone and Weight measurement	Highland Track - rough
Before 1715 and far earlier	Outside ancient shebeen	Lifting Stone with possible Clan association	Highland Track - rough

** In this time frame Gaelic culture was severely restricted and oppressed due to the consequences of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 and the aftermath of the battle of Culloden in 1746. Stone lifting would not have been as practiced in anyway like the extent it was prior to 1746 if at all.*

As the probable history of the Inver Stone reaches further into history, we have to assess the local Clan and its history.

The controlling interest in this area of Deeside has always been, and to this very day still is Clan Farquharson, an offshoot of the Shaw's of Rothiemurchus. Invercauld is the ancient seat of the Clan but not too far away from both Inver and the Mill of Inver is a curious pile of stones known as Carn na Cuimhne or the Cairn of Remembrance.

This was the gathering place of the men of Clan Farquharson, each of whom, was required to lay down a stone prior to a battle and when returning would remove their individual stone. It was by this manner that the Clan Chief could account for the loss of men in battle.

It is the proximity of Inver to both Invercauld and the Carn na Cuimhne that could give the Inver Stone some Clan association and with that, all the cultural practices associated with Gaelic strength be it a test to prove manhood or a test to become Buanachean, the strength elite and functional killers of each Clan.

Based on the knowledge of quite a number of traditional stones, I see it most likely that the history of the stone has progressed through different time frames but underpinning it all is that the stone is a lifting stone. When its first modern lifts were being made in the Victorian era, it is more than likely that it was lifted not because it was a heavy weight used for measurement but it was a lifting stone of considerable age.

Moving on to the modern lifts of the stone.

October 24	Mr McHardy minister	2	2		"	4	"	10
	William Farquharson of Monabru	7	6	1	"	12	"	
	Jas Farquharson of Invercauld	6	4	2	"	8	"	
	Lord Syle Marr Lodge	2	2		"	4	"	
	Capt Gordon of Abergeldie	4	4		"	8	"	
	William Cummin Auchindrins	1	1		"	2	"	
	Mr Jas Stewart Allanaquich	2	2		"	4	"	
	Chas McHardy Dellavore	4	2	2	"	4	"	
	Duncan Cummin Castletown	2	2		"	4	"	
	John Watson d	2	2		"	4	"	
	John Cattanich Killoch	2	2		"	4	"	
	Findlay McHardy Inver	2	1	1	"	2	"	
	Alex Davidson Mill of d	2	1	1	"	2	"	
	Mordach Symond Mains Monabru	3	2	1	"	4	"	
	Peter Duncan Tinnabaich	3	1	2	"	2	"	

Farm Horse Tax Register for Crathie 1797/1798

The Farm Horse Tax Register document as above features two well-known surnames of Aberdeenshire strength namely McHardy and Davidson. Alex Davidson was the miller of Inver however his son Sandy became somewhat of a local celebrity but more importantly apart from taking on the mill after his father's death, he was also a very good friend to Robert Dinnie.

Robert Dinnie, the father of the great athlete, Donald Dinnie, told the writer that he and Davidson measured legs, and that each was 18 inches round the calf

The Romance of Poaching. William McCombie Smith, Reprint, p. 138, 1988

Being extremely good friends certainly puts a degree of suspicion on Robert Dinnie (stone-mason) and Sandy Davidson (miller) having the necessary skills and reasons for inscribing a mark of weight on the stone which is lighter than it is and indeed both can be placed at Inver after 1820. It is from this time period that we learn of the stone being lifted.

The folklore attached to the famous Donald Dinnie infers that his Christian name was taken after Robert Dinnie being so impressed with a Skye man called Donald MacDonald lifting the Inver Stone that he would call his first born male after him. Whether true or not, it cannot be discounted as indeed Robert Dinnie was a frequent visitor to the area. One must remember that the entire population of the Parish of Crathie which includes the village of Braemar numbered just 1500 souls. Most people resident in the parish would know of one another and some oldies would have been able to state substantial family histories. One extremely well known family in the parish were the McHardy's.

William was modestly described as "a great man for heavy lifts". Indeed, on one occasion when John Lamont the carrier was temporarily absent, he quietly and as a joke put the **268lb** Inver lifting stone into his cart.

The McHardy Boys, The Scots Magazine, August, 1998.

William McHardy was born in 1804 and this particular lift is perhaps the oldest recorded of the Inver Stone and although William's younger brother John was considered far stronger, as he was indeed more successful in competition at the Braemar Games, the Horse Tax Register shows Inver as being a McHardy stronghold. I think that there is absolutely no doubt that in this period the likes of Sandy Davidson, Robert Dinnie and a multitude of the McHardy family were lifting the Inver stone on a regular basis.

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 when 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 later resulted in the release of "Of Stones and Strength".

Now having been brought up with the knowledge of the Inver Stone from a very young age it was not until 1993 that I again physically saw the Inver Stone. In the summer of that year and after a climb of seven Munros (Scottish Mountains over 3000ft in height) with my father 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.



Big Jock McColl lifting the Inver Stone at the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow – Peter was in the audience.
Photo courtesy of David Webster.

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 finality of his illness. We

were greeted by Mrs Richards and shared tea with her in the area she puts aside for the records of visits to the stone. 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 an air of disappointment when an attempt to lift the stone, discouraged of course, failed to put the wind underneath the stone but I suppose that this is the mindset of all stone lifters. Regardless of circumstances, even with the onset of death, failure is fickle mistress which disappoints regardless.

Cameron was well known to have exhibited in his lifts, traditional styles of lifting. He was known to have carried out a *lift and throw* of a traditional stone in Highland Perthshire and a local newspaper reported on his *lift and carry* of the Dalwhinnie Stone where he decided to carry the stone and place it on the bar counter of the Loch Ericht Hotel. I suspect that if indeed he did lift the Inver stone, that the myth surrounding a free pint being offered at the Inn if the stone is carried and placed on the bar counter was spawned from the illustrious Cameron.

The current list of those who have put the Inver Stone overhead is an array of worldwide strength with every single lift a substantial name in strength.

1. *Bill Kazmaier (USA)*
2. *Hamish Davidson (Sco)*
3. *Francis Brebner (Sco)*
4. *Laine Snook (Eng)*
5. *Sebastian Wenta (Pol)*
6. *Andy Cairney (Sco)*
7. *Matt Vincent (USA)*
8. *Chris Burke (USA)*
9. *Luke Reynolds (Australia)*

There could well be another overhead lift of the famous Inver Stone.

Capes added to his day's triumph, winning all but three of the eight events by becoming the first Englishman to have lifted the 265lb Inver Stone above his head. He is only the second Briton to have achieved this feat of strength, the first being yesterday's Scotland captain, Hamish Davidson.

The Glasgow Herald, 1983

As ever, stone lifting history is steeped in the controversy of what men have done and what they haven't in relation to strength. The alleged lift by Geoff Capes took place at an England versus Scotland Highland Games at Aviemore in 1983 and being reported about in a reputable Scottish broadsheet of the time, the lift certainly appears to be genuine but still remains unconfirmed.



Luke Reynolds, the most recent overhead lift of the Inver stone

Roch Ford Stones / Glen Buchat

Editor – Peter did not have an article for these stones. What follows is pieced together from a series of emails in 2013 and 2014. Initially, a stone was located at nearby Glen Livet, this resulted in a search of the surrounding Coffin Roads. It became apparent that there was another stone lifting location nearby and also a landmark named Three Stone Hill.

Lifting Stone, Glenbucket, Crathie etc. -- A lifting stone was a stone used by the young men of the district as a test of physical strength. Various of these were formerly well known locally. The lifting stones in Glenbucket are beside the way to Cabrach near the Roch Ford They are a group of stones of different sizes; the task, no easy one, being to pile them on top of a pointed rock. The Glenbucket and Cabrach men used to have contests there.

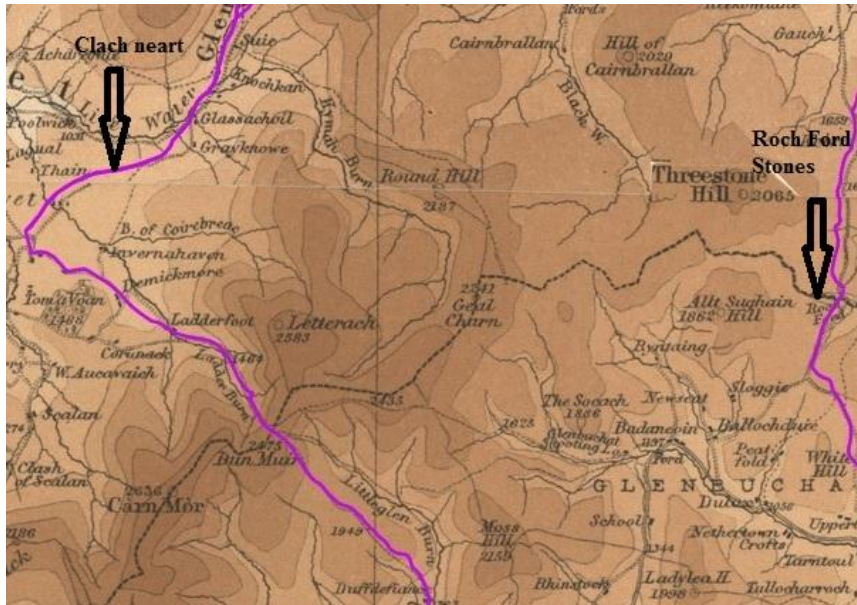
Place-names of Aberdeenshire, William McCombie Alexander, p. 321, 1952

The Roch Ford , Glenbucket. (Scots for rough ford) – The crossing of the Howe water, a top branch of the Deveron, on the track to Cabrach. Two tracks lead north from it into Cabrach, to the Gauch and the Bracklach respectively, both now much disused. Minor names near the Roch Ford: The Lifting Stones are beside the track on the south side of the ford.

Place-names of Aberdeenshire, William McCombie Alexander, p. 363, 1952



Plinth for the Roch ford stones at Glen Buchat



The arrow on the left indicates the location of the Glen Livet stone. The Roch Ford stones are indicated by the arrow on the right. Note the *Threestone Hill* indicated on the map

Peter was an experienced hillwalker and he needed no more than a map and compass to find the stone lifting site. He was aware that the location was within a Sporting Grouse Moor and he contacted the estate to avail them of his plans.

His first visit was partially successful and he was able to locate the plinth. However, the stones themselves were not obvious and the pressures of time and diminishing light ended the initial search.

For the return visit, Peter enlisted the local community and a few stone lifting friends. They knew the stones were last mentioned in print circa 1952 and were confident they could be found.

Unfortunately, this proved not to be the case. Despite searching the appropriate area with local assistance, the stones remained undiscovered. The possibility remains that they were deliberately moved to be used for other building needs or to adorn a suitable driveway or courtyard.

As a consequence of the search for the Roch Ford Stones, a connection to the Dinnie's and Inver were also surfaced. There is a nearby memorial cairn, known as Davidson's Cairn. It was built to remember Sandy Davidson, a well-known poacher who was found dead at this spot.

Davidson was a personal friend of Robert Dinnie who visited him when he owned the Mill of Inver (near the Inver Stone) and there is a reference to both men measuring the girth of each other's legs.



Davidson's Cairn

Alexander 'Sandy' Davidson, 1791-1843, Prince of Poachers

Alexander (Sandy) Davidson, 1792–1843, was born at Mill of Inver, Craithie, on Deeside.

Who died in 1843 in the heather on Creag an Sgor

Argyle and Bute

Island of Ghiga



On the island Of Gigha there exists a two handed putting stone known as Clach Dhomhnall mhic Lachlann (The stone of Donald son of the Norseman). The mythology surrounding it is that the stone was thrown some 250 yards compared against the existing record by an Islander in recent times of some 12 feet. The stone is approximately 120 lbs in weight but it is not a “putting stone” in the Highland Games sense but it is a putting stone by definition.

Stone of Strong Black Donald

Kilchurn Castle

Editor - Loch Awe and the Dalmally History Association were trying to find the Stone on Peter's behalf in 2010. I contacted them again in 2018 and they confirmed that there was no local knowledge of this story anymore.

From Lochaweside we learn there is a stone of this sort, which a certain “Donull Dubh Laidir” had for frequently testing his strength, trying to lift the stone every day. So powerful was this gentleman that he could “twist off a cow’s leg, if the cow was not older than four years old.” The reciter of this legend carefully explains that Strong Black Donald was *not* the Devil.”

The Games and Diversions of Argyllshire. Robert MacLagan, p. 233, 1839.

Dumfries and Galloway

Lifting Stane Farm

Editor – Peter did not have an article for this stone. References to it are easily found. The stone was lost circa 1805 according to Peter. The main reason for including it is

to show that ringed-stones are rare but did exist. The Airth Smiddy Stane. Esson Stone and the Dinnie stones being the other ones known to Peter.

Along the banks of this sunny burn there was a greensward plot, where the young men in the neighbourhood, in these early days, used to practice various athletic exercises. Here lay the ponderous lifting-stane, with iron ring affixed to it, sufficiently large to admit both hands.

The Scots Magazine, p. 157, January – June, 1824,

Liftine Stane – This is the name of a small farm very near the aforesaid village. Lifting large stones or heavy weights was one of the amusements of our ancestors. Near the general rendezvous stood a large stone with an iron handle run in to it, for trying the strength of the different competitors. The name of this farm and its vicinity to the mote and village aforesaid leave no room to doubt that the lifting-stane stood here.

Closeburn, Dumfriesshire, Reminiscent, Historic & Traditional, R. Watson, p.54, 1901.

Whithorn Priory

Dumfries and Galloway

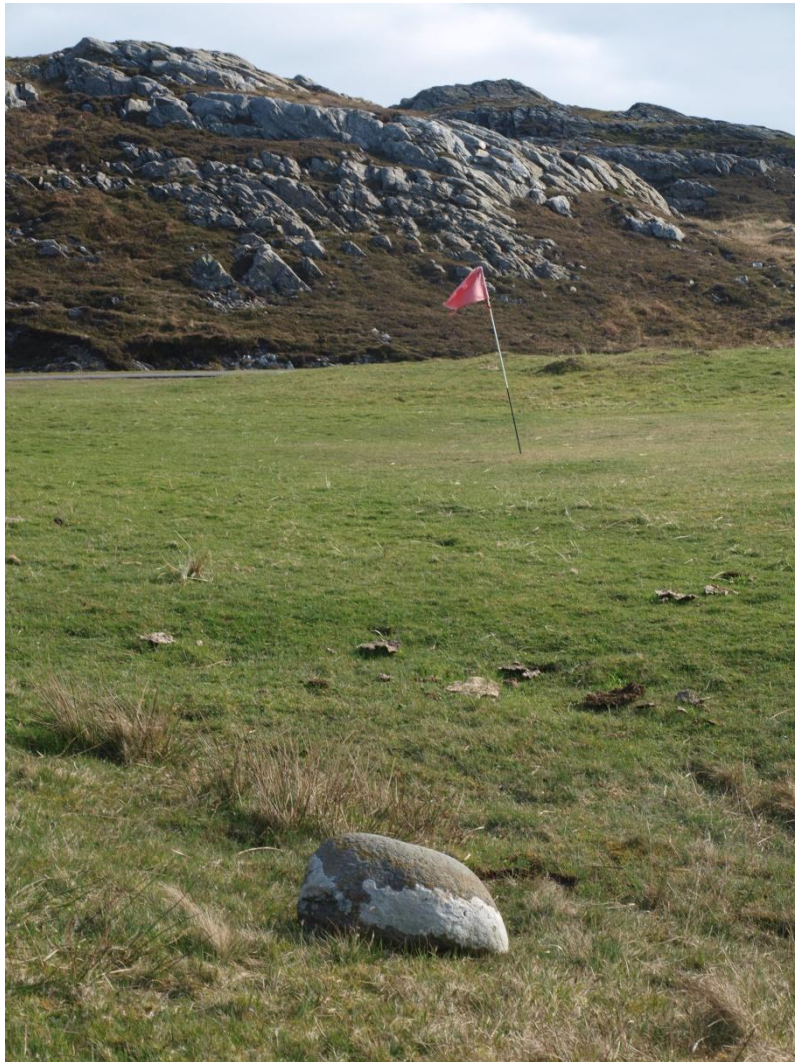
Editor - A number of known lifting stones are located near churches. For example, The Puterach and Blue Stones of Old Dailly. Peter was researching this stone and surrounding area to determine if there was a history to this stone.



Hebrides (Inner)

Colonsay Stone - A' Clach Thogalaich

112kg/246lb



The island of Colonsay in the Inner Hebrides is not the remotest of islands that possesses a traditional lifting stone although it perhaps one of the least accessible. This may be the reason it has received few, or perhaps no visits, since it was mentioned in *Stones of Strength*.

The stone was first mentioned by William Stevenson, a Victorian archaeologist who visited the island to examine its historical past.

On the sands of this small bay, and between high and low water marks, tradition says a battle was once fought. It was called the battle of the spears or sheaves, from the weapons used. Bones are still at times dug up by fishermen when digging bait. On

the links here games between the inhabitants used to be held, and on the road side lies the Colonsay lifting stone (Clach Thogalach), which every young male of Colonsay is expected to be able to lift before he is called a man. It is an uneven boulder, and the difficulty is the catching hold of it as much as the weight.

Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries in Scotland Vol XV,
Notes on the Antiquities of Colonsay and Oransay, William Stevenson, p.129, 1881.

Stevenson associates the stone with manhood, a fact contested by the island's present Gaelic speakers.:

The stone is reported to have been found on the shore line of Dun Gallain near Machrins circa 1780 by Donald MacFadyen who is attributed with its first lift. How the stone arrived at its present location involves one of three variations. The first is that the stone was removed by a horse and the second that the stone was carried by MacFadyen in a fishing creel which I personally find unlikely. The last and more plausible method, perhaps because it shows an aspect of originality which also has been replicated with other stones, is that that the stone was removed by using the plaid as a makeshift harness.

He also informed me that the tradition was that the stone had been carried, perhaps from the shore, to its present resting place wrapped in a plaid on a man's back. It says much for the strength of the man and the strength of the home-spun plaid that this should have been possible, but in the olden days plaids being woven very hard, were of great strength. The Lifting Stone is certainly foreign to the ground on which it now lies.

Scotsman Newspaper (Edinburgh), The Lifting Stone, p14, 23rd July 1932.

Using the plaid for the transporting heavy items was common-place. Other lifting stones such as at Achnangart, Lealty and at Glenelg were also known to have been lifted in such a manner.

The location of the lifting stone is indeed strange suggesting, as others on the island also suspect, that the stone probably originated from somewhere else on Colonsay.

Historically, the Golf Course on Colonsay where the stone presently stands was first used as early as 1775 some 5 years before the arrival of the lifting stone. The Golf Course has probably changed little over the years and is a perfect example of Golf in its early form as it is simply laid out on an expanse of flat machair with 18 holes put into the ground, with grass kept short by hungry sheep. Historically this area was a known meeting point for the local communities where Golf, stone lifting and other games were played.

This leads to the obvious knowledge that in Gaelic culture, such activities were participated before and after Sunday Church service. In this respect there is a derelict Church and graveyard of some antiquity just over one mile distant at Kilchattan. Although there is no local knowledge of a "coffin road" linking a

community to the church at Kilchattan, close by the roadside and near to the old graveyard there is an obvious pile of stones that were clearly used as a remembrance cairn indicating that the present road may well have followed the lines of an ancient coffin road. As with many other stones in Scotland, it could well be the case that the Colonsay lifting stone sat adjacent to the road and hence, its present location may not have been too far from its original position.

The lifting history of the stone is rather sketchy and devoid of any real certainty.

It is known that in the early 20th Century, Professor William Watson of Edinburgh University and a lecturer in Celtic studies who himself was known to participate in the occasional Highland Games, attended at the stone and in his words *“failed to put wind between it and the ground”*.

The stone has always been purported to weigh 280lbs. I suspect that it is far lighter and indeed does not match the Inver Stone in weight with probably its correct weight being in the region of 240 to 250lbs. Neither should grip itself be a problem as the underside of the stone is almost completely level allowing an edge around the stones maximum circumference.

During World War 2 some British soldiers who were stationed in Colonsay are alleged to have had regular successful attempts in lifting the stone and a small broken off section is attributed to them in making the stone easier to lift. The photograph below would tend to suggest that any advantage gained was probably minimal. Another story regarding the stone is that a strong man from Gigha died from a rupture sustained while attempting to lift the stone which as a consequence caused the local factor to have the stone buried. This may indeed be the origin of the stone being removed but it is known that other injuries were also sustained in lifting the stone.



An upright view of the stone showing a clear “broken” section

The celebrated Gaelic historian Seton Gordon visited the island in the 1930's and spoke to a local man who alleged that he has lifted the stone and placed it into the back of a horse cart and he also stated that the stone had been successfully lifted by other islanders on many occasions.

In the 1970's the island of Colonsay was visited by the Schools Hebridean Society, a charitable trust that brought teenage boys to various Scottish Islands to allow the young men to experience outdoor life. The Society camps when visiting Colonsay was always on the flat Machrins adjacent to the lifting stone.

On the 29th August 1971, the stone was attempted by the campers and their attendant supervisors and the following account of how the stone was lifted by Peter Carlile demonstrates a modern uptake on placing the wind underneath the stone by using a stick:

The Lifting Stone lies in the north-west corner of the old golf course, where our camp was. It is said to have been lifted by Donald Macfadyen on the shore near Dun Ghallen in 1780. The stone was taken by horse to its present resting-place. At one time no male on the island was considered a man unless he could lift the 21/2 cwt. stone. Many people injured themselves in attempts to lift it, and a man from Gigha died shortly after an attempt in which he ruptured himself.

As all these attempts took place many years ago it was decided that the officers should disturb the long rest which the stone had had. It was decided that for a lift to count the stone must be lifted in such a way as to allow a stick to be passed under it.

School's Hebridean Society Report 1971, The Lifting Stone, p. 76-77, John Williams

Most islanders are aware of the stone and its location and if you are fortunate enough to visit, try lifting the stone facing the Atlantic Ocean and consider that the nearest landmass is Greenland and the North American Continent.

The present population of the Island is approximately 100 however many centuries ago it would have been far greater. Close to the capital of the Lords of the Isles at Finlaggan on the nearby island of Islay, Colonsay itself produced many men of strength. One particular man of strength, a Gallowglass whose initiation involved lifting a heavy stone, was Alaster Mac Col.

Born in the early 1600's, Mac Col was distantly related to the Marquis of Antrim, showing another example of the Scots/Irish mix. Mac Col was left handed and as a consequence he was simply known as Col *Keitoch*.

He was a celebrated warrior, especially in Ireland where as a Gallowglass he fought against English Colonialism. One of his feats of strength which is recorded took place on Colonsay. One particular day, a rampaging Bull was loose. Mac Coll approached the Bull which on seeing him made straight in his direction. He did not flinch a muscle and as the Bull approached him at speed, he simply grabbed it by the horns and pulled it to the ground. On bringing down the beast Coll purportedly

celebrated by carrying out the feat of the *cold fist – dorn fuar* upon it. Whether the story was actually true, it was known that in the 19th Century, residents of the Island could point out the location of this feat of strength however this has been long lost to the current community.



At present the Colonsay community have no knowledge of anyone living on the island that has lifted the stone although it is known there have been a few attempts. The Clach Thogalaich therefore sits forlornly neglected awaiting its first lift in modern times, a feat for which most of the island community would be justifiably proud of when their stone achieves its true purpose as a test of strength rather than a curio for the tourist.

Island of Coll - Clach Altruman Mor



The Island of Coll possesses the best retained example of a ritualised Gaelic stone lifting for many reasons. At Torastan on the island, a known coffin stop with plinth has two stones which rest atop it.

We are now at Uchd nan Carn, and whether or not we pause to test our strength in trying to lift either the “togail,” the “altruman mor” or the “altruman beag,” Coll’s famous lifting stones, we cannot delay to narrate the various traditions bearing on their presence there.

Handbook to the Islands of Coll and Tiree– by Hector MacDougall
and Rev. Hector Cameron. Published, p.52, 1930.

The stones are therefore known as Clach altruman mor and Clach altruman beag. The direct translation of the Gaelic is slightly confusing. Gaelic dictionaries give two differing translations that are so different in character. One reference translates altruman as “*chief*” as in Chief of the Clan however by far the most accepted definition is “nursling” as in being someone who is breastfed. Could this have some significance in relation to manhood and the myth of clach cuid fir? The definition itself does imply a form of physical test indicating the age of the person intended to lift it.

Clach altruman beag.....the little nursling stone would appear to have been expected to have been lifted by younger men and indeed its weight, at no more than 150 lbs would lead one to think that this stone was expected to be lifted by youths and not men. The stone would be a reasonable test for youths between the ages of 10 and 14 years, the age of manhood. Quite simply this stone itself may well be the only physical example of a true *clach cuid fir* in existence.

For all the stones mentioned in this book, the *Clach altruman beag* is by far the most culturally historically significant lifting stone in Scotland. Strangely, it is also by far the lightest. It is simply a “clach cuid fir”, a stone of man’s portion more normally referred to as a Manhood Stone.

The mere presence of this stone itself leaves no other determination for the reasons for its existence and there are no other stone lifting sites, except that as previously stated at Glenelg, that has two stones of far differing weights.



Clach Altruman Mor

The Clach altruman mor is exceptionally smooth and weighs approx 250lbs. Although oval in shape it has a curious bulge in its centre girth and one side of the stone as shown, has clearly been smoothed even more by a continual rubbing against the plinth.

The dimensions of the stone are as follows –

Girth – 50 inches

Length – 27 inches

Breadth – 18 inches



The Clach altruman beag

The Clach altruman beag is oval and at approximately 150 lbs sits atop the plinth alongside its far bigger brother. There are no lifting problems with this stone as an adult male should be able to remove and replace the stone onto its plinth prior to an attempt is made on the larger stone.

This said, when removing the stone it would be wise to consider that this too was a test of strength and the stone has perhaps more relevance than most others. It is unique and its position in Scottish Stone Lifting makes it worthy of respect and perhaps if there is a younger son in tow, let him try and prove his worth.



Another curious aspect of this site is the obvious line of stones behind the plinth as shown on the adjacent photograph. Again, at Gaelic funerals it was a well-known custom to throw or put a large stone in memory of the deceased and quite simply this site is the only one such remaining that still possesses these putted stones. If visiting this site one should remember that these stones were thrown in respect and they should not be picked up and thrown again and this has to be stressed to the utmost as the site is of considerable historic interest.

The population of the Island of Coll is no more than 200 and most of which will have little or absolutely no knowledge of these stones and their historical purpose. The history of these stones should be preserved regardless.



The text by MacDougall and Cameron alludes to various cultural traditions in relation to the lifting of both stones however does not specifically name them. Certainly, the use of the smaller stone to prove manhood would be one. The larger stone would be used as a traditional test of strength between mature men. This is in addition to the lifting of the stone at funerals being another however there is one other cultural reason of significance.

As one islander mentions, they were known as “his and her” stones. The heavy stone lifted by the men and the lighter by the women. Now before anyone thinks that lifting stones was also a pastime of Gaelic women, there are indeed a few references

to this and all relate to a stone being lifted by woman as part of a pre -marriage ritual. It is more than likely that this was also the case with both these stones at Torastan.

History aside, there is indeed some known lifting history of the Clach altruman mor. By common consent amongst the islanders the last known lift of this stone was by Neil Gallagher and although details of it are sketchy it is assumed that the lift took place during the years of WWII.

Another known lift was by another islander called Hugh Andy McKinnon who was known locally as “Hughie Handy” and he was well known for his athletic prowess. Hugh was born in 1919 and sadly died in 2011. His ancestry was of the Coll fisherman and he was known to have told many tales of sleeping in caves and surviving rough seas. As a road worker he helped lay most of the islands roads physically moving many heavy stones in the process.



Hugh Andy McKinnon

It is thought that Hugh lifted the Clach altruman mor before the onset of war in 1939 when he enlisted in the army and joined the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders. Hugh was part of the ill-fated British expeditionary force who remained during the Dunkirk retreat and he was subsequently captured by German forces. True to his character and strength, in a narrative called “the five lost years” he explains how he arranged many escapes from his prisoner of war camp.

I suspect through various photographs of the site that the stone has indeed been lifted in more modern times however by whom is unknown so in essence there has been no repeat of a lift in 60 to 70 years.

While on this island it is perhaps befitting to tell a tale of the strength of the men of Coll. An islander in the employ of the Duke of Coll in the 19th Century was ordered to visit Glasgow on an errand. When he reached the town of Dumbarton he was required to pay for the toll road and the payment was more if the road was used by a horse and rider. The man from Coll enquired if he was to pay for any burden that he carried and when the answer was given that he wasn't, he simply picked up his horse and promptly walked down the road carrying it

The history of stone lifting on the island of Coll may require further examination as quite simply the site at Torastan may not be the only place where testing stones exist. At Crossapol on the south of the island there is an even older graveyard which is remote in the extreme and rarely visited.

There is also a further written reference to lifting stones on Coll taken from The Old Statistical Account of Scotland Volume 10, p.414, 1791.

Tradition tells us of the remarkable stature, strength and valour, of John the Great, the Laird of Coll's predecessor.....Though Neil his brother was not near equal in strength, he could raise to his breast three stones, on top of each other, weighing at least 16 cwt. The stones remain still at the place.

I would point out the obvious in relation to the actual weight lifted but would rather leave an opinion to the discerning reader regarding the physical dynamics of lifting three heavy stones atop each other. This said, there is actually known history regarding "John the Great" and who he was.

John the Great was known as "Iain Garbh" in the Gaelic which translates as Stout John in recognition of his great size. He was the 3rd son of Lachlan Bronnach of Duart and became the Laird of Coll around 1431 being the first chief of a break-away branch of Clan McLean. He was known to possess a double handed sword of such an immense size and so famous that a Piobaireachd (*pee -broch*) for the Highland Bagpipes called "*Claidheam mor Iain Gairbh*" (John Garbh's Great Sword) was composed in his honour. John McLean died as young man on the island however when one of his descendants was being buried in 1856 a bone from his remains was retained and examined which confirmed his immense size.

The reference to Neil and John (1431) is one of the oldest stone lifting references which can be found however the cultural history and use of *coffin stops* and the lifting stones at funeral processions is indeed centuries later. The obvious inference regarding the stone lifting site at Torastan is the fact that by including the plinth there is indeed three stones! Unless you are known as Neil McLean.....don't bother trying.

Isle of Skye

MacCrimmon Stone

A lift and carry. No other information known

Tree Stone

Clach – chraoibh Iain 'Ic Thearlaich – The stone-tree of John the son of Charles (John Mackinnon), Camuscross, late teacher; he placed this stone in the fork of a tree about 1850, and it remains there almost grown into the wood; it cost considerable labour placing, as it is some size.

Place-names of Skye and adjacent islands, Alexander Robert Forbes, p. 360, 1923

Editor: I was aware that Peter was investigating this stone. I followed up his research with the Sleat Local History Society in 2018. They were very helpful and thorough but unfortunately there was no local knowledge of where the tree had been located. They provided the reference in this book and even researched the locations of schools of the 1850s in an attempt to find the stone.

Hebrides (Outer)

Berneray – Ultach Ghillie Mhoire

The Weight/Burden of Morrison

The island of Berneray is linked to North Uist by a causeway and is well worth visiting as the island has a flavour and a culture far different from its near neighbour. In Gaelic and Clan ownership terms, although closer to North Uist, Berneray is part of the Island of Harris estate and the indigenous people of the island see themselves as more attached to the culture of the Island of Harris than they do North Uist with which they are now linked.

This aspect of its culture is actually shown in its proper Gaelic name *Beàrnaraigh na Hearadh* meaning Berneray of Harris although the roots of its name are indeed old Norse meaning Bjorns Island.

Little remains of the community that existed near Loch Beag Bhuirgh but the remains of the crofts and buildings can be clearly seen around the area of the curiously styled *Chair Stone* (a legendary place of execution). Within this area sits Ultach Ghille Mhoire or the weight/burden of Morrison. The stone is still there, it is just that the local inhabitants have, through the passage of time, lost the knowledge of which was lifted.

The only description of the stone is that it was a large white stone and there are a few scattered about the remains of the former community situated some 400 feet south of the lochan



The Curious Stone Chair

The stone was first lifted by Donald Morrison and was named after him. Very little is known of Morrison himself other than the fact he was an islander and exceptionally strong however more is known of his death. In 1842 the sailing ship “Sir William Wallace” floundered off the west coast of Berneray. Morrison and another man were chosen to guard the vessel during the night however both died through exposure in severe weather.

There are many suitable white stones that match the description with the best example lying slightly north east of the stone chair. Perhaps further investigation will reveal the true stone but the site is still worthy of visiting.



A White Stone and a reasonable possibility

I am sure that one may be asking why should I visit this stone lifting site to lift a stone of which we are unsure. However the answer to this question could have been answered by the Giant Angus MacAskill who was born and was raised for the first 14 years of his life only a half mile from this very community. Angus would have known well the stone. Also the timelines of both he and Morrison, combined with the small size of the island, make it likely that they actually knew each other. MacAskill was born near Cnoc nan Claigean and his birthplace is marked with a standing stone cairn exactly the same height as the man himself. The memorial looks over turquoise waters to the northern shores of North Uist and the solitude and indeed the tranquillity of this location should be experienced.



One should note that there are a large number of stones lying immediately outside the memorial. If visiting the testing stones of North Uist it would be remiss of the stone lifter not to make the short journey to Berneray and pay respect to Angus MacAskill. I could think nothing better than lifting any of the stones with the memorial in the background.

North Uist - Clach Eorna (The Barley Stone)

Donald MacRury.....Archibald son of Alexander son of Hugh in Balemore and Donald son of Ewan on the Claddach of the Hill of Flax.....They could all lift the Barley Stone at the end of my father"s barn.

This stone is mentioned in AJ MacDonald"s "Hebridean Connection". The oral tradition of the stone is contained in page 91 and was derived from the story told by MacDonald"s father who, according to the book, resided at *No 8 Knockline*. I suspect that this stone was not so widely recognised as a test of strength but simply a stone that the MacDonald family and friends would practice with.

North Uist - Clach ic caoilte & Creag asduinn

Grid reference - NF740671 (?)

This stone so requires to be found as it has the most wonderful example of Gaelic folklore and oral tradition attached to it that surpasses the legendary *Bodach Craigh Fianna in Glen Lyon*.

The stone still exists, it has not been removed however the locals, aware that such a stone is still there, no longer know it"s exact whereabouts. It is neither lost but neither is it known. Despite serious attempts to identify this particular stone it is allusive, but it is still there.

Should this degree of uncertainty debar the inclusion of Clach Ic Caoilte alongside the likes on the Inver stone is a question that requires to be addressed by the individual lifter himself.

If visiting North Uist, it would be well worth the short drive to Creag Asduinn at Paible, the location of Clach Ic Caoilte. Wander the slopes of Creag Asduinn and search for a suitable stone, lift it and relish the history and mystique of this very special place.



The summit Creag Asduinn now known as Creag Hasten.

The village of Paible is situated on the west coast of North Uist and from the main approach road Creag Asduinn can be clearly seen tucked into the south western section amongst the many farming crofts. The history of the Creag reveals that at one time in the past it was used for Christian worship prior to the building of a church and there are many tales of fairies and goblins frequenting it to such an extent that a local farmer named Angus MacDonald has stated that when he was younger he was frightened to venture anywhere near its flat level summit. What makes the Creag so important is its position in ancient Gaelic folklore which involves the lifting of a stone known as Clach Ic Caoilte.

At the long end of the great world Creag Asduinn was situated in the majestic ocean on the flat plain of the seabed known as An Domhain (the beginning place). This was the home of Manan who was the son of Lir (Lidhir), the king of the sea. One day Manan asked the son of Caoilte (Ic Caoilte) who was a Fomorian (a semi divine race who preceded the Gods) to take the stone of destiny (the Lia Fail) and return it to Tara, the high seat of the Kings in Ireland.

Manan told the son of Caoilte that he should take no longer than one thousand years and one day to return the stone or else there would be consequences. The son of Caoilte began his quest to return the stone to Tara however on his journey, for some reason or another, he became distracted and forgot entirely about his promise to return to Creag Asduinn within the allotted time.

Manan was not pleased when Ic Caoilte returned one year and one day late. He shouted at him telling him that as punishment he had to lift a large stone, shoulder it and then carry it and place it upon the highest spire of his palace. Manan pointed to a large black rock and demanded that the punishment be carried out forthwith. Ic Caoilte approached the stone and lifted it with ease

(as they were under water), then shouldered it and climbed to the top most spire of the palace whereupon Manan immediately drained the ocean of water and the true heavy weight of the stone became excessive for Ic Caoilte who dropped it onto the sea bed. He again repeated the task but each time he reached the highest spire, the water was again drained. This continued for exactly one year and one day when Ic Caoilte dropped down dead through exhaustion.

This is the bare bones of the story of Clach Ic Caoilte and Creag Asduinn although there are a number of variations.

In so far that the explanation of Creag Asduinn is purely mythical there is indeed a Clach Ic Caoilte and part of its lifting history is known. The MacVicar's were known as a North Uist family who established themselves on the island in the 15th Century having moved from Kilmun in Argyll. The Clan MacVicar were known for their individual strength and indeed Donald MacVicar was the last person known to lift Clach Ic Caoilte circa 1820.

Within the Hebridean Connection (MacDonald/Fergusson -1984) there are indeed many references to the story including two variations of it however it is also hints that the stone is not of the type linked to the lore of a ten ton boulder lifted and thrown by Ossian, Fionn or indeed by the Devil and every suggestion supplies hints that the stone is of "liftable" proportion.

This is illustrated by Donald MacVicar, the uncle of young Marion, the famed 19th Century sennachie, who was the last of the North Uist strong men to lift Clach „ic Chaoilte, the big boulder on the slope of Creag Asduinn, for centuries used as a decisive test of strength in North Uist. - Page 164

The stone of the son of Caoilte to this day is lying on the shoulder of Creag Asduinn - Page 349

My mother put some food and drink for us in a bag and we held the picnic right on top of the Rock of Asduinn. Afterwards we walked across to the Boulder of the Son of Caoilte... - Page 210

The location of the stone was known up to the early 20th Century when it was pointed out to Angus John MacDonald who was regarded as the last of the great Gaelic Sennachies (Story Teller). MacDonald was born in North Uist in 1900. He was co-author of a book published in 1984 titled "The Hebridean Connection" which was published privately in the USA and which is in essence a collection of known Gaelic stories, some folklore, some true as recited by MacDonald. As with men of strength, those who could retain the detailed and lengthy Gaelic stories were highly revered in this culture. To be known as a Sennachie was indeed a great honour and

MacDonald's book tells of many stories of stone lifting and strength within the Paible area

MacDonald confirms the Clach Ic Caoilte as a large dark stone situated on the slopes of Creag Asduinn which had been for centuries used as a test of strength for local men. Returning to the opening preamble about this stone being lost, it is still there but cannot be identified. The pace of change on the island is extremely slow and there would be absolutely no reason for the removal of the stone from Creag Asduinn and if it had been this would have been known about.

Having examined the texts thoroughly as well as conducting a search of the site at Creag Asduinn it is clear that one would be looking for a large dark stone on the slopes of the hill. It is surprisingly not a particularly large area to cover with the only aspect to consider being the build-up of soil over the years. The stone is likely to be partially covered in soil due to the westerly winds blowing sand from the nearby beach which would be deposited on the Creag. Experience dictates that when searching for such a stone, it is more than likely semi buried and in an unusual situation.



Weight would be a consideration but shape would not. This said, there are one or two likely candidates. Sitting on the south western slopes, which is also perhaps the best sheltered area of the Creag from the prevailing winds, a large boulder is situated near to a large outcrop of rock. Its original position was initially difficult to discern as the stone was leaning against the rock to such an extent that it initially appeared that they were joined. Further examination revealed the stone to be separate and not part of the rock. This certainly was unusual and if I was to stone lift on the Creag, this sheltered area would be my preferred choice. The obviousness of looking for a stone on the flat level summit of Creag Asduinn should be weighed up against the fact that the text reference mentions that the Clach Ic Caoilte was situated on the slopes of the Creag.

This stone, perhaps in the region of 350 lbs may not be the stone but then again it might be. There are actually few options but then again, if visited and indeed lifted, local attention may well be drawn to the Brotherhood of the Stone and perhaps some local person may indeed through a quirk a fate say one day “that’s not the stone, it’s over there”. Truth is stranger than fiction and if does happen one day, the lifter who manages to identify the stone and then lift it will be remembered for time ever lasting among the greats of stone lifting and their name would also be etched into Gaelic folklore.

In a strange quirk of association, Angus John MacDonald joined the Kilmarnock Burgh Police in 1926. Some 70 years later I was a Sergeant at Kilmarnock probably locking up the later generations of families known to MacDonald.

As an aside, and to perhaps show some degree of association between the Brotherhood of the Stone and the Sennachies of Gaelic culture I find the following oath of the Sennachie extremely poignant and relevant to all stone lifters.

Instruction through vows
To preserve inviolate the history of the fathers
To pass it along without bias by instruction
From mouth to mouth, from knee to knee
The witness and heritage most precious
In the power of the free as opposed to the un-free
Without injury to any person or thing
Without twisting the truth in opposing deceit
Without strengthening evil, without weakening justice
So long as the breath is warm and blood in the body
To the awakening of the Fionn

I would like to think that throughout all parts of this book on stone lifting, messrs Crawford, Davis and Martin and have adhered to this vow as indeed all who have had the privilege of lifting a traditional Scottish Stone.

A number of other stones are mentioned within “The Hebridean Connection”, all situated in the Paible area.

It is known that the “Weight of Neil son of Uis” was a local testing stone that for some reason or another was built into the walls of the local school which in now the single shop in the village.

North Uist - Ultach Ailleann Raghnaill

Grid reference- NF825652



Donald Alick Nicolson photographed in 1983 with the Ultach Ailean Raghnaill.
Only known picture of this stone, courtesy of Donald Ferguson.

I was informed of this stone initially by Alex MacAulay and latterly by Donald Ferguson and Donald Ailck Nicolson. This stone, which if still extant, would have been one of the greatest strength tests in the entire country.

Alan MacDonald (Iolaraigh) was 18 years old when he lifted this stone which was estimated to weigh 5cwt. He did this prior to departing for job in the shipyards of Glasgow. His lift was in line with an ancient trait of male Gaelic culture. Specifically, it was a desire to prevent his community forgetting him, even if he was never to return.

The tragedy is that he died in an industrial accident within weeks of leaving North Uist.

Although in relative terms the stone is modern, its importance in culture cannot be understated. It is unfortunate that when the A867 Lochmaddy to Clachan road was being widened, the contractors inadvertently moved the stone to either the bottom of the Loch or under the road itself. I am aware that after this unfortunate incident, local people remonstrated with the contractors who placed a “replacement stone” at the road’s edge in a relatively similar position.



The replacement stone

Suffice to say as a memorial to Allan MacDonald the present stone is unsuitable and probably more so, un-liftable. It should perhaps be noted that the weight/ lift of Allan MacDonald in relation to size and shape is not too dissimilar to the array of boulders that break the loch from the roadside further west however we are not that fortunate that the stone was used as one of these breaks.

If this stone had been still extant it would have without any doubt been highly revered by the worldwide strength community.

North Uist - Ultach Aligean Mor



The stone above is the Ultach Aligean Mor on North Uist. It is located near the Old Blacksmiths at Malaclete, Sollas on the island and strangely enough I did not find this stone. So highly respected this stone is, it is shortly to be set upon a display plinth with a possible inscription and it will always be available for lifting.

North Uist - Ultach Dhomhail Mhoir The Weight/Burden of Big Donald



Ultach Dhomhail Mhoir

Quite simply, why and how this particular stone has been unknown to the Scottish strength community let alone the worldwide community is beyond comprehension. This stone is the heaviest known traditional lifting stone in Scotland and yet it has never been written about and the sole knowledge of it, up until recently, has been retained verbally within the small Gaelic community of North Uist.

Perhaps the reason for the stone not being known further afield is due to the controversy that surrounds it and indeed this controversy rages on within the island community to this day.

The weight of Donald McLellan sits by the roadside near to the turn off for Griminish and is easily identifiable sitting on its concrete plinth with attached historic plaque and this is where the controversy arises.

The stone itself weighs over 400 lbs and is truly a massive test of strength however the now rusting plaque attached to the plinth at the site explains details of its *first* lift.



This stone was lifted to arms length overhead by Donald Mor McClellan, Runa in circa 1876

The reference to “*arms length*” is purely the translation of *Ultach* which in stone lifting terminology means a stone lifted into the lap or the fold sometimes referred to as arm’s length. The controversy surrounds the claim that this stone was pressed overhead by Donald McLellan and this does not sit well with many of the islands current residents.

Underpinning this controversy of whether the stone was pressed overhead or not demonstrates another aspect of the culture of the Island and one which is deep rooted and extremely important to the Islanders of North Uist.

One may well be aware from reading previous chapters that religion and traditional stone lifting in Scotland are intertwined. The inhabitants of North Uist are Presbyterian and mostly members of the Free Church of Scotland who hold strong religious beliefs such as the observance of the Sabbath. Part of this culture is such that there is a strong disapproval of flippant or unsubstantiated claims and this includes the reference made on the plaque to the stone being pressed overhead.



I have spoken personally to the grand-daughter of Donald McClellan, an elderly resident of the island who strongly repeats that her grand-father did indeed press the stone overhead and any attempt to convince otherwise meets with disapproval. In an extremely small and tight knit community, the McLellan family have many relatives who also believe that the stone was lifted overhead. For those that agree that the stone was lifted in such a manner, there is almost an equal number who quite vociferously state that it wasn't. When researching this stone I received numerous contacts from various islanders wishing to put their family slant on this particular stone.

Such is the immensity of this disagreement, a number of years ago; the grand-daughter of McClellan was interviewed by BBC Radio nan Gael. During this Gaelic speaking interview, she again reiterated the feat of strength by her ancestor. The next day she awoke early in the morning to find that the stone had been moved during the night and was now in situ blocking the front door of her house.

I have been informed of who was probably responsible for this act, however if you have the opportunity to visit and lift the stone then I would suggest a neutral stance to any claim is taken. That way no-one will be offended and it will of course allow the stone to remain in situ.

Regardless of whatever claim, there is absolutely no disagreement that the stone was indeed lifted circa 1870 by Donald McLellan. He was known as a very strong man with inclusion of "Mor" in his title being quite apt.

Another claim is that the stone was lifted 60 years ago by a Donald John MacDonald, into his lap, however the relatives of the McLellan family still hold to the fact that the stone has never been lifted since 1870. This said, and despite its weight, I am sure that there will be many of the worldwide strength community that could indeed lift the stone and perhaps when this has been done a few times and to the knowledge of the islanders, then this dispute over credibility may be laid to rest.

The stone is mentioned in the 56th Volume of the Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness which was published in 1991 with the only addition to the history of the stone being a comment that Big Donald "lifted the stone with ease" and that the lift was witnessed by many. The article itself makes no mention of the stone being pressed overhead.

What of Big Donald Himself? In his time he was regarded by the islanders as perhaps the strongest of men on the island. There was however some competition. Donald was born on the island in 1846 making him about 30 years of age when he lifted the stone. When I spoke to his grand-daughter regarding this feat of strength she distinctly emphasised that Donald was in his 50's when the feat was achieved and although the passage time may make the reality slightly confused, this could equally apply to how the stone was actually lifted. In any case, Big Donald or give him his Gaelic patronym *"Domhnaill Mor mac Dhomnaill mhic Aonghais mhic*

Dhonnaill Ruaidh MacGill „ Fhaonlain was a member of the Naval Reserve. However for most of his life he was a lobster fisherman fishing the waters off the Hebridean Islands and West Coast.

Donald was related to another man of strength, Donald Morrison of Berneray through his mother's lineage (see ULTACH GHILLE MHOIRE)

Whatever, the stone still waits to be lifted by a non-islander however I would stress again the importance of observing the Sabbath on the island and a reminder that stone lifting on a Sunday may well be perceived as being disrespectful.

The stone itself is so different from the perceived smooth, oval granite eggs so associated with Scottish stone lifting. It is however extremely heavy and in essence pure raw strength is the requirement for lifting the stone from its plinth. As the stone sits at angle and on a flat plinth it is relatively easy to move it about. Don't let this deceive you as it is extremely heavy.

To perhaps demonstrate the size of the stone itself the following are the recorded dimensions;

Length- 30 inches

Breadth–16inches

Height – 14 to 16 inches

Girth at centre – 59 inches

It is quite obvious that the size and weight of this stone will compare favourably with that of the Criccieth Stone in Wales.

When visiting North Uist, what is evident and most striking is the remoteness of its small communities. The nearest community to this stone is at Griminish, a collection of less than a dozen or so small crofts, but still a community known for its ancient strength.

Aongas Mac Uisdean Ghriminish (Angus the son of Hugh of Griminish) or Angus MacDonald was a native of Griminish. Although he was a Church of Scotland Minister he was also known for his exceptional strength.

This clergyman was noted in the country as a man of extraordinary muscular strength. He had no equal in the place for lifting ponderous weights (stones), or for any of those athletic exercises that required great bodily power

Celtic Magazine Volume V, Page 57, published 1880.

Angus preached on many of the Scottish islands and indeed as far south as the Island of Gigha where he was first given the respect due to his strength in being called "*Ministear Laidir*" – the Strong Minister. Angus had a granddaughter called "*Fionghail nighean Raonuill „ic Aonghais Oig, un Airidh Mhuillin*" - Flora the daughter

of Ranold, the son of Angus, the younger of Milton. She is otherwise known as Flora MacDonald, the great heroine of Scottish history who assisted Bonnie Prince Charlie in escaping from English (British actually) troops and was celebrated in the famous boat sail from North Uist to Skye in the Skye Boat Song.

Editor's note: In recent times the stone has been lifted by Alex Roberts and James Grahame (in that order). The etiquette, as it was explained to them, indicated that the lifter was not to boast of their own strength. Rather their strength may be spoken of by others, should they wish to. In keeping with that ethos, the videos of the lifts are not on social media.

North Uist – Ultach Dhomhnail Iain Dhonnachaidh Eabhail The Weight of Donald John MacVicar



Donald Alick Nicolson with the Lift of Donald John MacVicar

I was informed of the location and history of this stone by Donald Ferguson and Donald Alick Nicolson. The physical strength of the MacVicar's of North Uist is highlighted numerous times within the Hebridean Connection (MacDonald/Fergusson 1984) and indeed there is every suggestion that the last lift of the Clach „Ic Caoilte on Creag Asduinn was carried out by the grandfather (still being researched) of Donald John MacVicar. The stone was pointed out to Donald John sometime before 1910 and he lifted it when he was 17 years of age.

North Uist - H'airde Glaise

Ultach Alasdair Mor

350Ib?

Grid reference - NF775737



Ultach Alasdair Mor

Knowledge of this stone was derived from Angus MacDougall (Malacleit) and Alex MacAulay (Paible). The stone is also mentioned in *On the Crofters Trail* (David Craig 1990) where the author is informed by Norman Johnston (Lochmaddy) that the stone is known as Big Alastair's stone, lifted by Alastair Matheson during the period of the Sollas clearances.

In the 1930/40's while preparing the modern road, the following Sollas men lifted the stone –

- Earddsaidh Mor Dhomhnuill Sheumais (Archie MacDonald)
- Eoghainn Lachlainn Aoidh (Ewan McLean)
- Domhnull Earddsaidh a'n Aonghais „ic Ghalleasbuig Eoin (Donald Archie McRory)
- Domhnull Dhonnrachaidh an Dubhghallaich (Donald MacDougall)

In August 2014 Alex Roberts (Birmingham, England) put the wind underneath the stone in the presence of Angus MacDougall and Alex MacAulay and the lift was highlighted in the *Island News* and *Advertiser Newspaper*.

Situated near Malacleit in North Uist, this traditional lifting stone is simply one of the heaviest in the country. The stone is certainly no less than 350 lbs in weight and this in itself makes it an exceedingly hard challenge for the stone lifter although grip is not a problem.

The history of this stone is significant and reflective of turbulent times. The Highland Clearances have been mentioned frequently in this book as quite simply this savage time of Highland History has had such a significant impact on Scottish Stone Lifting.

Sollas in North Uist was badly affected by this enforced depopulation of people and perhaps to put this savagery into a understandable time perspective, Donald Dinnie was 12 years of age when the people of Sollas were forcibly cleared from their homes. In August of 1849, Lord MacDonald (4th Baron) who was the local landowner decided that his land should be given over to sheep for grazing. MacDonald's factors evicted over 600 people from the area, burning their crofts and in doing so they were aided by members of the Glasgow Constabulary of Police who batoned local women for throwing rocks at them. The people were starving and could not afford to pay high rents so they were simply removed.

One of the crofters whom the Laird's factors and Police did not want to meet was Big Alistair Matheson. On the day of the evictions, Alastair was lured by the prospect of free food being handed out far from Sollas and had left to secure sustenance for his family. Big Alastair was known as the strongest man in the area as he was the only one known to have lifted the stone at Malacleit although it is well known that many men did attempt it. Over the years it was known as Ultach Alasdair Mor and in the 1980's the stone was daubed with red paint by Alex MacAulay from Paible to distinguish it from other stones. This history of the stone had almost been forgotten and nowadays the stone is better known as Ultach Na- H' Airde Glaiss.

The stone lies within the heath and bog of Airde Glaise near the roadside of the A865 road and it was during the construction of that road in the 1930's that the last known lifts of the stone took place. While preparing the road and reaching the ancient stone at Airde Glaise, three men of Sollas took turns in lifting the stone up to waist height. The stone has lain there ever since with no-one even attempting this serious lift in modern times.



The stone is almost pyramidal in shape with its leading edges measuring 30, 27 and 23 inches respectively. Weight apart, adjusting the stone for optimum lifting will take some time.

Another factor to consider is that footing in the wet boggy heath so associated with the islands will be difficult to achieve.

To date no one from outside North Uist has lifted this stone and as the changes of modern society and culture are equally prevalent on Uist as is elsewhere, the young men of the island have no interest in the activities of their forebears.

The stone appears to be more Icelandic than the iconic granite egg which so depicts the shape of traditional Scottish Stones and this indeed may well be as a result of the heavy Norse influence on the island in both culture and language. For those fortunate enough to visit the island then quite simply a good lift will be one where the stone is lifted into the lap.

Editor's note: I was unable to find the stone in 2017 and I noted a new fence was nearby. It was unclear if the stone was (re)moved permanently or not.

North Uist - Ultach Griminis

From my conversations with Donald Alick Nicolson, he had also lifted this stone although its precise location is uncertain. He referred to the stone as "Ultach Griminis". Donald Alick also mentioned lifting this stone to Donald Ferguson (Lochailort) and that the stone was opposite Vallay. Other than being a separate stone I suspect that the stone in all probability is the Ultach Na- H" Airde Glaise.

North Uist - Ultach Heisgier

Knowledge of this stone was derived from Alex MacAulay (Paible) and Donald Ferguson (Lochailort). The stone is associated with the Stewart boat builders from Grimsay and was allegedly lifted by a number of the same family on visits to the island. The exact location of the lifting stone is unknown although I do recall mention of it being near a harbour or jetty.

North Uist - Ultach (Hosta)

Again the knowledge of this stone was obtained from Donald Alick Nicolson. From what he said about the stone is that it was in the vicinity of Scolpaig and Hosta. Donald Alick lifted the stone but did not give a name for it.

North Uist - Ultach Neil 'ic Uis

The weight of Neil MacCuish

This is another stone mentioned in the Hebridean Connection and from which it is quite clear that the stone is unlikely to be repatriated.

He was particularly concerned with the welfare of the family of Neil MacCuish for he had great admiration for strong men like Neil – a man as strong as any in Uist. (The "Weight of Neil MacCuish", a large stone, lay in the boundary between Red Ewen son of Alexander the Younger son of Edmund son of Archibald, at the back ridge of Balemor, until the desecration by the masons building a new school at Bayhead, who removed the "weight" which they placed in the foundations. This was the heaviest weight used in weightlifting on North Uist. There is no doubt that lifting the stone was a trial of strength by strongmen long before the age of Neil MacCuish and it is probable that it was so named in consequence of the tragedy of Neil being taken away so suddenly in the prime of strength. - Page 254

He was also good at weight lifting, the test of strength among the men of old. In his day, he and Archibald son of Alexander son of Hugh in Balemor and Donald son of Ewen on the Claddach of the Hill of the Flax were best at the weight in Paible. They used to try the "Weight" of Neil son of Uis at the back of the High Ridge in the boundary between Ewen the Red and Edmund son of Archibald....though none of them could lift these weights - Page 91

From memory, I was informed that the school referred to still exists and is indeed now the grocery shop in Paible.

North Uist - Weight of the Plain of Asduinn

.....and the Weight of the Plain on the plain of Creag Asduinn, though none of them could lift these weights. ...I do not know who was last to lift it, but Donald son of Donald son of Angus (MacVicar) was the last to lift the "weight of the plain". (This stone is still in the original position on the plain of Creag Asduinn; a sum of two pounds sterling was donated by two of us in Sydney to defray the cost of its removal to the museum lately erected by the pupils of Paible Junior Science School at Claddach of the Hill of the Flax, plus a suitable inscription; no steps have been taken to carry out our wish. A.J.M)" - Page 91

On a visit to the Plain of Creag Asduinn I spoke to Angus MacDonald a local farmer whose livestock graze on this expanse. Angus confirmed the existence of a lifting stone however could not specify its precise location. It can be assumed from the text that this stone and its location was relatively well known until recently.



The Plain from Creag Asduinn

The area where the Weight of the Plain is located is expansive. From my conversation with Angus MacDonald there was an initial supposition that the stone was located near to the local sheiling visible in the upper left of the above photograph.

Editor – at this point, Peter left the Island without finding the stone. Only at a later date did he examine his photographs when back on the mainland. I received a subsequent email...

...certainly not obvious from the photograph and indeed was completely overlooked by myself in the course of my research until recently was a configuration that I have seen so many times in relation to traditional stones of strength and that is the obviousness of a “roundish stone” and “plinth stone”. This configuration can be made out in the lower right of the photograph.



Close up of "round stone and plinth configuration"

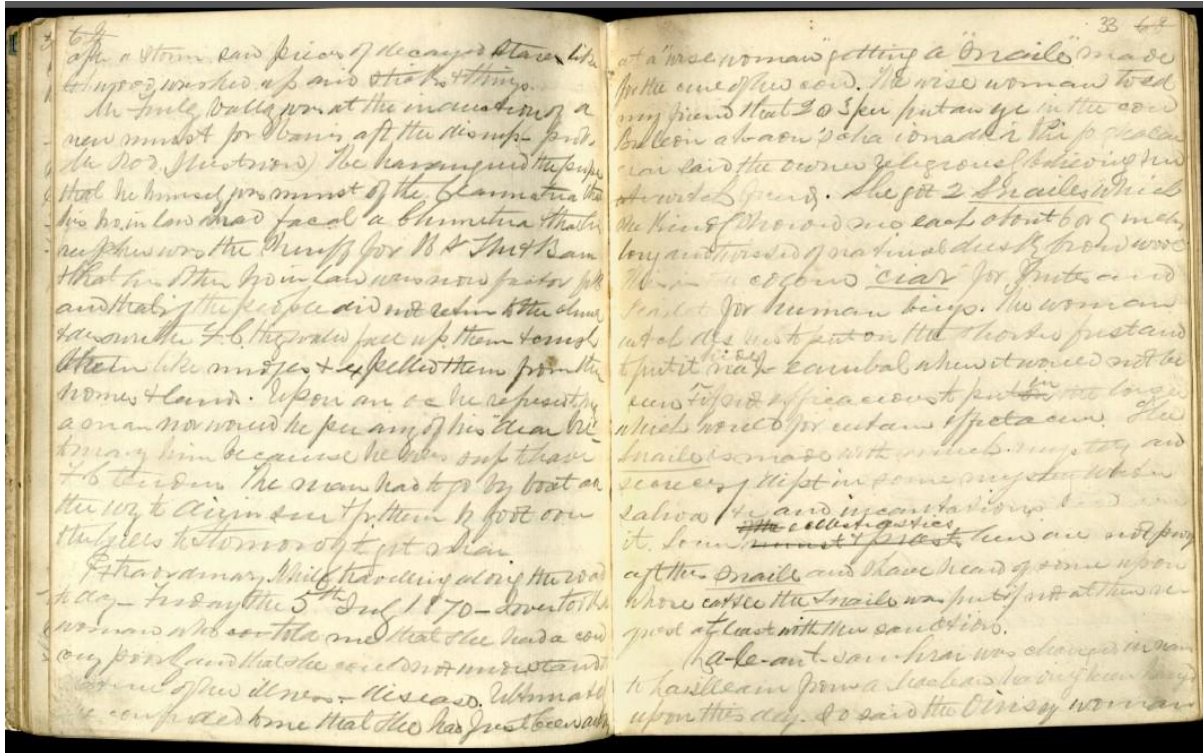
Again local verification of the Weight of the Plain is necessary and although the stone identified may well not be the stone, I do suspect that due to the configuration that the roundish stone was probably subject to ad hoc lifting at some point in history.

Taransay – Unnamed Stone

Editor: Peter had no article for this stone and I am only aware of him mentioning it once on a strength forum. Knowledge of this stone comes from the field notes of Alexander Carmichael (1832 – 1912). Carmichael was a pioneering folklorist who

documented a vast amount of folklore, traditions and antiquarian data, particularly from the Outer Hebrides.

His collected works are located in Edinburgh University. Through contact with them I was able to obtain the following transcript.



Fieldnotes from Alexander Carmichael

Two stories relating to the rocks and seaweed on Tarasaigh/Taransay, 8 July 1870

Clach-ultaich at Mol-mircein a long & per[pindicular] round granite pillar
ab[ou]t 3½ f[ee]t & 14 in[ches] dia[meter]

Grey like millers tweed of old
persons used to lift it.

A lad fr[om] Caolas Scalpa tried it
He lift[ed] one end & let it fall & broke it

He was a v[er]y strong young fel[low] but had enough to do to lift one end.

Peter had high hopes that this stone could be found. The Island has been uninhabited (apart from tourists) since the 1970s and is very difficult to access. He anticipated this journey

I am quite excited about this stone as firstly there is a great chance that it still might exist....it is located at Mol na mircein on the island of Taransay.

The downside is that to visit will require travelling to the Island of Skye....ferry to Island of North Uist then onto Island of Berneray, a quick ferry to the Island of Harris

and then try and find someone who is prepared to sail me to Taransay and more importantly.....reliable enough to remember and pick me up!

Highlands

Achnangart (and others)

Editor – Peter was known to have visited the township of Achnangart and seen the stone there. I have included these extracts from emails in the hope that further information can be obtained from the readers of this book. There must have been several stones of note in the area. The stone at Glen Elg (mentioned below) still exists but is fixed to the top of a pillar and no longer available to lift.

In visiting the stone at Achnagart I met....a man well into his 60's. He is touching 6' 6" and powerfully built. He is obviously strong but as a farmer his strength will be practical. After the usual collection of history of the stone we talked for some time about strength. This man was a powerhouse but not once did he mention feats of strength about himself. He talked about the strength of his father, his grandfather and other relatives.

...As for the area around Glenelg.....apart from the *above* it also has both the Murchison Stone... Achnangart stone.....both stones lifted as feats of strength rather than as traditional lifting stones. There is a traditional lifting stone in nearby Morvich or Glen Shiel with a known lifting history but its location cannot be ascertained other than it sits near a quarry and there are quite a few of them in the area but it just emphasises the tradition of stone lifting within Kintail.



Stone at Glen Elg. Natural, despite looking like an Atlas stone.
Placed on the plinth before 1839 and thought to be around 320lbs
Scottish Notes and Queries, Volume 6, June 1892 to May 1893, page 135, Published 1888,

Another stone is placed upon the top of one of the substantial pillars which form the gateway to the churchyard of Glenelg. It is a spherical boulder of eighteen inches in diameter. Common report has it that it was brought from Strathglass , distant over 30 miles, by a shepherd in his plaid. No man can lift it now!

Auchernack Stones Clachan-near Achernack

Small 103kg / 226lb

Large 130kg / 286lb

Editor – This section is the combination of emails and extracts from a separate article Peter created before successfully finding the Auchernack stones. He speaks at length about the naming convention of the stones.



John (Stewart) rose to the rank of Captain in the 53rd Regiment, and retired on half-pay. He was called the oichear mor, the big officer, from his great size. It was said he had no equal in Strathspey for strength. There are two boulders that lie near the gate of Achernack, Clachan near, which were used as tests of strength. One man out of ten might lift the smaller over the dyke, but not one in a thousand could do this with the other. The big officer could toss them both over, one after the other, with ease

In the shadow of Cairgorm, Rev W Forsyth, p.196-197, 1900.

Instantly it should be seen that the published work clearly alludes to the fact the stones were still in place in 1900. Further texts on these two stones repeat the affirmation of the strength of John Stewart and the fact that both stones were used as traditional tests of strength, but they also pinpoint the location of the stones to the gatehouse at Auchernack.

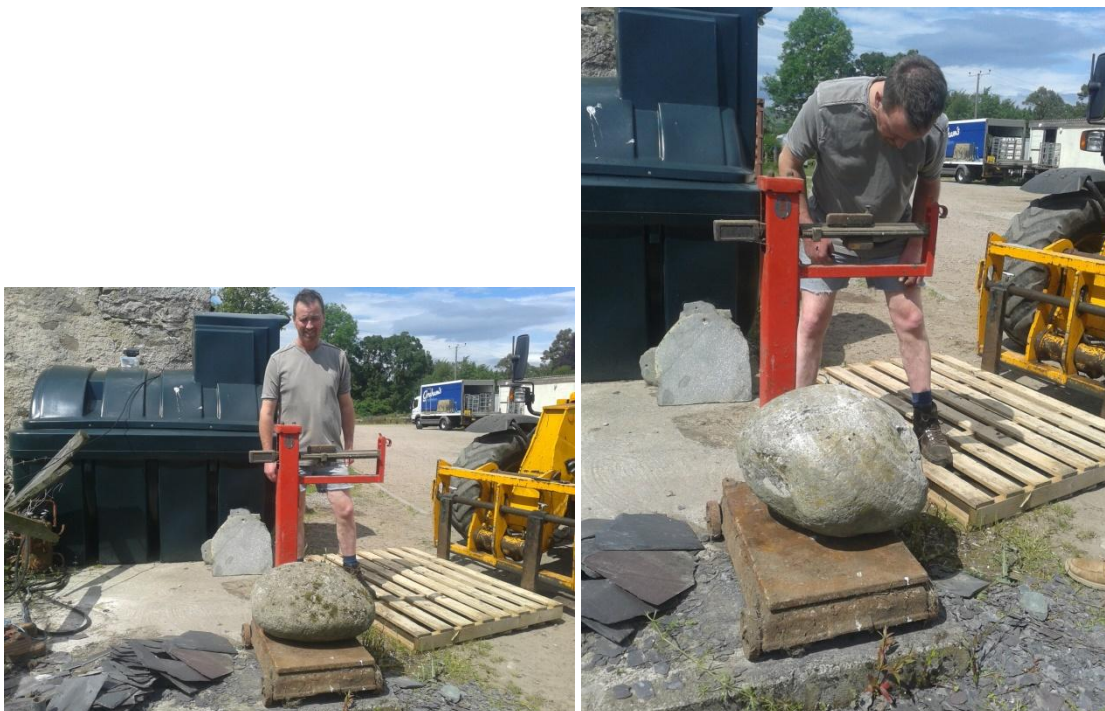
The reference to both stones calls them “Clachan neart” and again it should be emphasised that these were no putting stones. There is more than a hint that as the stones were required to be thrown over a dyke wall and not placed on top, that the actions of John Stewart was an emphasis of superior strength.

The lifting and throwing over a recognised plinth is not a unique style and is also replicated with the Wallace Putting Stone.

The Barevan Stone, was also known as Clach Neart – the Putting Stone of the Clans. In addition to this, the Clach Neart of Strathmore of Durness is again a heavy stone, a lifting stone that was also expected to be thrown. The inclusion of these stones of Auchernach strengthens the evidence that the Clach Neart was not simply a putting stone as used in today’s modern Highland Games.

Rather, it strengthens the argument that such stones were so named only because they were expected to be thrown, regardless of actual weight.

Editor - Peter subsequently found the stones were located at Auchernack Farm in Grantown Upon Spey. The first visit to this location was in 2013 with James Grahame and Martin Jancsis. After some rudderless wanderings, we found a farmer who shared his knowledge of the stones and proceeded to weigh them. As the apparatus was being dragged in to position, it was explained that the stones originally sat at the entrance to the farm.. However, they were moved farther in to the driveway as people returning from a night’s drinking were injuring themselves in impromptu attempts to lift the stones.



Stones being weighed, 2013 at Auchernack Farm



Peter Martin and James Grahame

Barevan Stone

THE PUTTING STONE OF THE CLANS

105kg/231lb

"All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!"
From Macbeth by William Shakespeare (Act 1, scene 3)

Most Scottish Stones have some form of historic association, some more than others. Occasionally any cultural significance is lost by those with eyes only for the shape and weight of the stone. The Barevan (spoken Ba – ree- van) stone suffers not by weight, shape nor history and will never be indifferent.

A rounded ball of reddish granite, 19 inches by 17 inches in diameter, and weighing 18 imperial stones, lies near to the entrance of the chapel. According to tradition it was the "putting stone" of the neighbouring clachan, but it takes a strong man of the present day to lift it

History of Nairnshire by George Bain, p.130-131, 1893.



This stone, with its oval shape, size and weight could so easily be a sister to the Inver or Dalwhinnie stones and in itself is a fine looking example of a traditional lifting stone.

Some eight miles East of the City of Inverness and six miles south of Nairn lies an area so much associated in history with the “Thanes of Cawdor” the most celebrated being “Macbeth”. Within the Kirkton of Barevan at Cawdor lies a truly ancient church which dates back to the 14th Century and within the church graveyard is situated the testing stone known as The Putting Stone of the Clans

On the 10th May 1880 I visited Barevan.....Near the east end of the church, there lies a rounded ball of reddish granite, 19 inches by 17 in diameter, and weighing 18 imperial stones .Its shape and weight caused it to be used in the neighbourhood as a test of strength in the older days.....the present tenant of the farm, William Mackintosh who is seventy-seven years old (obviously born circa 1803)Mr McIntosh was himself able in his younger days to lift it and place it on the dyke and the grandmother of the friend who accompanied me was capable of raising it by means of her apron, put below it rope-wise to catch hold of it.

Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Volume 16,
Chapter VIII by William Jolly, published, p362, 1882.

This rather interesting quote alludes to three specific aspects of history and culture. Firstly, the text is clear that the stone was used as a stone of strength prior to the known lift by William Mackintosh and indeed would have been lifted in the 1700's.

Secondly, Mackintosh states that he lifted the stone onto a neighbouring dyke wall and this in fact is the sole written text in Scottish stone lifting history that mentions this. Although I would disagree that this practice was indeed used throughout the country I have to acknowledge this statement at least.

The third and perhaps most significant statement is not that the stone was lifted by a grandmother but the fact that she used an apron to do so. There are many heavy stones in Scotland such as the stone at Achnangart where it is known that the plaid worn by the Highlander was used as a form of makeshift harness to assist in the lift. (See Achnangart Stone and Lealty Stone). The knowledge of using an apron for a harness is so obviously derived from that of using the plaid.



The Barevan Stone in its rest position beside the “stone coffin”

Among other antiquarian objects of interest we may mention the vitrified fort of Auchindown, the graveyard of Barevan with its strength-testing stone - 'the clans' putting stone'

A salmon for the schoolhouse, a Nairnshire parish in Nineteenth Century,
from the diaries of Robert and Elsie Thomson, p. 132, 1994

The *lifting history* of the stone could in fact be much older, as the history of the stone itself can be dated to around the 16th century.



The Barevan stone sits beside what is regarded as a curious antiquity, a stone coffin and this gives an indication of the stone's age. This stone coffin was not for the dead but was used either as a form of punishment. Either for those who were deemed to have broken the law by the Kirk Session during the short time in Presbyterian use, or as a form of penance whilst used for Roman Catholic worship.

Whatever, in the case of the law-breaking miscreant at least, he was placed inside the stone coffin, the space for the head remained open and a stone slab was placed over the remainder of the body. To assure the slab was not removed the Barevan stone was placed on top. Although it is known that on occasion, those attending the church used to spit on the open face of the miscreant being punished, then this demonstrates that the stone itself can be reasonably dated back to 1560 and possibly before.

The stone is 252 lbs of rounded smooth granite. Lighter than the Inver stone but heavier than the Dalwhinnie stone and exactly the same oval shape. All the difficulties associated with these stones such as lack of grip are equally applicable to the Barevan stone.

The preamble to this stone highlights an association with MacBeth and the Thaness of Cawdor. Adjacent to the church is a modern extension where in 1993 the remains of Hugh John Vaughan Campbell, the 6th Earl of Cawdor, and the 25th Thane of Cawdor are interred.



The Earls resting place is marked by a most unusual and significant memorial and one which I am sure that those with an interest in strength and stone lifting would understand. The simplicity of the stone.

With all the associated history attached to the Barevan stone, it is perhaps fitting that the first lift of the stone in modern times should fall to a local man of strength. On 22nd March 2012, Martin Jancsics from nearby Elgin visited the site and had no trouble in shouldering this ancient stone



First 21st Century lift of the Barevan Stone by Martin Jancsics

Caithness – Rudh – a - Ultach Ghillie Mhoire

Editor - A work in progress at the time of Peter's passing.

His full name was Alexander son of George, son of Alexander, son of Alexander, son of Henry; the pedigree, after the Celtic fashion, being thus run up to the coroner's son Henry. He went to school at Bower. His manhood was notorious for height, strength and courage. The strongest man in Lord Reay's country, Thomas an Elenan, was beaten by him on Thurso sand at tug of war with a walking stick, and his deeds with wild cattle at markets were also famous. How he an Ingram Gunn carried a large Morayshire Tombstone in Dirlot Churchyard, erected to Alexander Gunn, farmer, Dalganachan, is a traditional feat; and another was his ease of dealing with the lifting Stones of Rudh-a-fuder, Loch More.

The Gunns, Thomas Sinclair, p.107, 1890.

Starting with this reference, Peter attempted to identify the possible location of the stone. Experience indicates that Coffin roads and Drover roads are often indicators of a lifting stone. Another firm indicator can be a churchyard.

He identified any coffin roads or Drover roads in the area around Loch More. A number of them converged on the township of Ashcorriectlett. There was also the remains of a nearby building thought to be St Bridget's Chapel.

The area was inspected by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland in 1961, who reported.

The supposed remains of St Bridget's Chapel are as described by the previous field investigator. The structure surmounting the mound cannot be identified as a chapel; **those stones which are exposed and in situ are not typical of such a structure being in most cases set on edge, neither do they conform to any known, recognisable pattern.** No historical evidence is obtainable in local libraries; the nearby croft of Achscoriclate is deserted and no one could be found in the locality with a knowledge of the area.

A photograph from 1982 reveals the possibility of the stones being at this location with at least two stones identifiable on it which can be deemed "set on edge", both of which certainly appear to be good lifting stones.



Clach nan Gillean

An ordnance survey map of Glen Coe from circa 1852 showed a river named Alt Clach nan Gillean which translated as *Stream of the Stone of the Young Men*. A likely site of a lifting stone. Researched but not visited by Peter Martin.

Dalness stone (Glen Etive)

Unknown weight



Stone of Dalness

The Stone of Dalness may not have any formal lifting history however the story of its finding and repatriation are the stuff of legend.

Whilst working in Glen Etive, Andrew Martin, the brother of the late Peter B Martin the co-author of "Of Stones and Strength" noticed a well-rounded and oval stone close to where he was working and he just had to tell Peter of its finding. Andy is well versed in stone lifting and knew a good stone when he saw one.

Although referred to as the Stone of Dalness the stone curiously sits near to Altchaorunn some 2 miles east of Dalness. In April 2001 Peter and myself made the visit to Glen Etive. At that time access laws allowed the local landowner to prevent access to the only bridge over the fast River Etive which required anyone visiting the stone to first undergo a river crossing.

The actual story is well told by Peter Snr in the DVD “The Silent Realm” in which he explains that on finding the bridge locked preventing passage to the south bank of the river, it was time to remove boots, socks and roll up the trousers. Following the path on the opposite side and in a rather wet state, we both tried to follow Andy’s instructions to find the stone.

Passing by the house at Altchaorunn, we continued onwards and upwards into a corrie stopping to view the beautiful rock pools below us. Realising that we must have passed by the stone we retraced our steps. Sitting in a grassy area near a clump of flowering daffodils was the stone. Smooth and oval granite, an obvious lifting stone that had been removed from the River Etive in past history. The search had been worth it and I was able to photograph Peter lifting the stone with his favourite mountain, the Buachaille Etive Mor in the background. I recall, that as we say in Scotland, “He was fair chuffed (pleased) with himself”.



The late P B Martin lifting the Dalness Stone

The Stone was brought to the public attention in a MILO article by PB Martin and lay undisturbed for 9 years.

Peter Snr associated the history of this stone with the classic tragedy of “Deirdre of the Sorrows” a story set within the Ulster Cycle of Celtic legend.

*Glend Eitchi ann do togbhus mo ched tigh
Alaind a fìdh iar neirghe
Buaile grene Ghлинд eitchi.*

Glen Etive in which I raised my first house,
Delightful were its groves on rising
When the sun struck on Glen Etive.
(From The Lament of Deirdre)

The stone sat in the shadow of a rocky peak called An Grianan but which is known locally as Deirdre’s Dressing table.

Knowing that my late father enjoyed lifting the Stone of Dalness I made a number of visits to Glen Etive to re-find it. Through the passage of time, there had been a new stone wall built beside the path to the cottage and the adjacent grass had now turned into a wet and peaty bog. It took two visits to examine a number of stones that were half submerged in the bog and eventually in September of 2010 the stone was found. There was certainly no grass or daffodils, just dirty fingernails as I clawed at each possible stone to remove and examine it.



The Dalness Stone “plucked” from the bog

As the above picture shows, the recovered stone had now a spattering of red paint but it was definitely the stone that my father had lifted. I failed to notice the mossy covered and semi submerged stone close by and decided to leave the Dalness Stone to consider its fate.

In October 2010 the stone was repatriated and removed to its present location by Martin Kotte, Thorsten Moser and myself. At that time, the second and similar stone was found and pointed out by Thorsten. It was dug up. Again, dirty finger nails but having exerted some effort in repatriating the Stone of Dalness, this stone would be left to later.

The Stone of Dalness was taken to its present site where it sits upon a flat rock plinth on the road side of the River Etive however still in the shadow of Deirdre’s Dressing table.

Exactly a week later, Paul Joseph and Steven Barlow visited the Stone of Dalness with myself and when informed regarding the second or sister stone it was thought that it would be a good idea to have that stone repatriated as well.



Deirdre's Teardrop

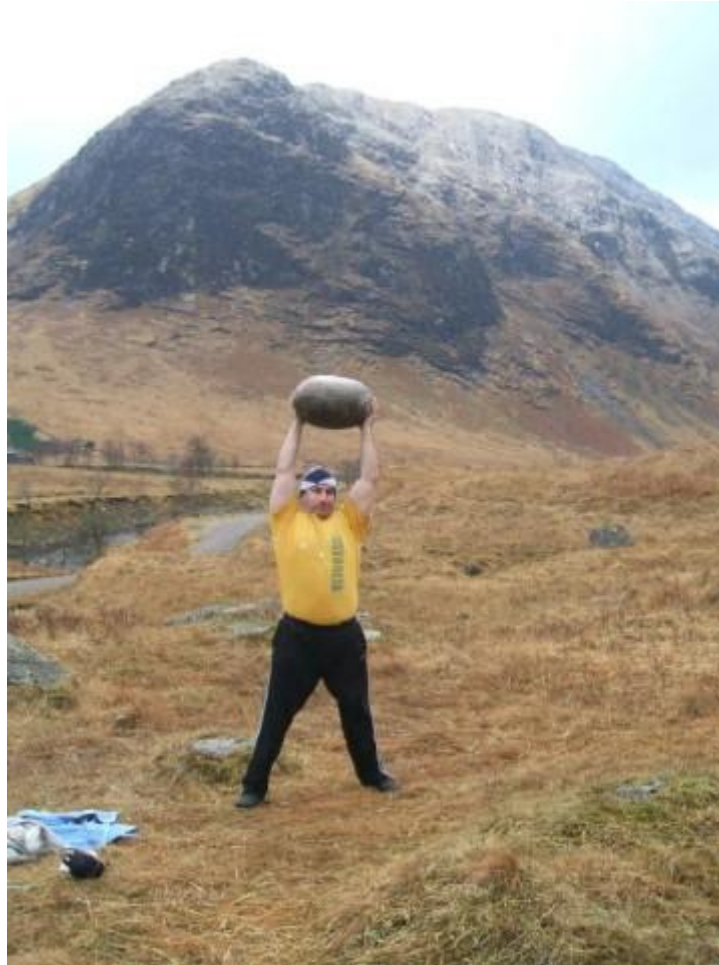
The stone was removed a quarter of a mile to its present safer location in a titanic but successful struggle by Steven and Paul. In respect to the legend the stone was named "Deirdre's Teardrop". There was some laughter at the choice of name. Steven's surname being Barlow was also the surname of one of the characters in the UK's longest running soap opera – Coronation Street. Deirdre Barlow is a very famous character and the dual connection with the stone and off course Steven had us all in fits of laughter.

The Teardrop is almost a replica but being perhaps 20lbs heavier than the stone of Dalness. Both are oval and water glazed making it difficult to grip. It sits a short distance west of the Dalness Stone at the base of a suitable rock plinth.

I know that Peter Snr would have thoroughly enjoyed the efforts of these fellow members of the Brotherhood of Stone.

Both stones could be best classified as fun stones as they have no serious weight. The beauty of both however is the location in remote and tranquil Glen Etive and the ideal photo opportunity would be an overhead press with Deirdre's dressing table in

the background. It was a true Highlander experience and a memory not to be forgotten. Both stones were pressed by James Grahame on 30th January 2011.



James Grahame pressing the Dalness Stone with Deirdre's Dressing table to the rear.



The Anvil of the Mists. Now known as the Study

Editor - By May 2012 both stones had been stolen and are no longer available for lifting.

Dalwhinnie
102kg / 225lb



The situation of this Inn is solitary in the extreme, lying upon the western bank of the Truim, far distant from all other habitations; and on all sides it is surrounded by crags and boggy heath, the silence of the scene being only broken by the melancholy murmurs of the stream

The Scottish Tourist and Itinerary published, p221, 1830.

For those who have visited Dalwhinnie, I am sure that they will echo the above 19th Century description of the area. It is more bleak than beautiful, more stark than serene however it does possess a stone of strength.

When the Dalwhinnie Stone is lifted, it travels further to the heavens than any other Scottish stone as the village boasts being the highest elevated in Scotland. The stone was discovered circa 1990 by PB Martin on many of his Highland forays and I recall his excitement when walking into the Hotel for a well-earned pint he found this beauty sitting outside. The stone was promptly lifted.

The Dalwhinnie stone is a fine example of Cairngorm Granite and was obviously, as it is well water worn, plucked from a nearby river. At 240 lbs the stone is slightly lighter than the similar Inver stone and fortunately or unfortunately (whatever way you look at it) its smoothness and oval shape again make any grip on its surface reasonably difficult.

Perhaps its beauty and weight make up for a lack of formal history. However the Dalwhinnie runs the Menzies Stone for the fourth most lifted stone in Scotland and it appears on most lifters "to do list", a testament to the stone itself.

The major attraction of this stone was its similarity to the long lost "Stone of Heroes" which was a larger but very similar stone used at the Newtonmore Highland Games.

There is a local claim that the stone at the Dalwhinnie Inn was placed at the location around the time the Stone of Heroes was recovered from the Spey dam in the early 1970's and the claim further states that both stones were sourced from the same waters. Knowing the story of the finding of the Stone of Heroes and having a reasonable description of it, this fact can easily be disputed. Both stones are far different.

Try as I have, the history of this stone is near non-existent. In historical terms, the only claim to fame that Dalwhinnie may possess is the fact that Bonnie Prince Charlie once passed by and that would seem to have been that. This supposed lack of history has spawned many myths including the story that local farmhands once lifted the stone onto a dry stone dyke as a test of strength. Perhaps equalling its history, the area is seriously devoid of working farms, so that account for the stone can be pretty much discarded and I again I have to reiterate that this idea of a heavy stone being lifted onto a dry stone dyke is not one that I can accept conclusively as a lifting style.

One has to examine Dalwhinnie, or rather its geographical position relative to other areas to ascertain some notion of the stone's history.

There is some evidence in the name of Dalwhinnie itself. From the Gaelic it is simply translated as the "meeting place" and this is extremely important. The location of Dalwhinnie was a vital link for the travelling Highlander with the main track from Inverness to Perth passing through the hamlet. This was off course updated by General Wade who constructed his military road along the same route, but of equal importance, there were many tracks leading due west to Bridge of Orchy and Glen Coe. Similarly, paths striking North West into Laggan gave access via the Corriearick Pass to the far North and Islands.



Roger Davis Tackles the Dalwhinnie Stone

As a convergence of these paths, it was known that Highland drovers driving their cattle southwards to the market trysts would have used Dalwhinnie as a nightly stop over. It is more than likely that the stone was taken from the nearby River Truim a tributary of the Spey and whose granite river bed perhaps lends a flavour to the famous malt distilled nearby.

It is not hard to imagine informal gatherings of Highland Drovers at Dalwhinnie and there is no doubt there would be competition between them involving the lifting of stones. This is the more probable reason for the stones existence and when General Wade constructed his road after 1745, he also added a small inn at the site of the present hotel. Extremely Spartan and devoid of even the known comforts of the time, the Inn would have been well utilised by the Drovers who would welcome a night not being spent under the stars.

There is no practical way to prove or disprove this theory of the existence of the Dalwhinnie stone however I would say it is the most probable. The stone is associated with the Highland drovers.

For those that have been unsuccessful with the Inver Stone, the Dalwhinnie Stone perhaps offers a better chance of success.

Editor:

AA Cameron's name is mentioned frequently as a lifter of traditional heavy stones. Specifically, the Dalwhinnie and Inver stones are often quoted. Direct references to these feats have proved hard to track down. One such available source of information is the Calum Maclean Project based at the department of Celtic and Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh. It hosts some archived materials from folklorist Calum M Maclean.

One such story was retold to Calum by John MacDonald of Highbridge on the 4th January, 1951. The translation from Gaelic is roughly

Many folk have heard mention of our local hero who was called A. A. Cameron. I knew him as well as myself and he was a decent, kind fellow. He would travel far and wide to attend Highland games and he used to win at putting the stone and every other type of heavy event. But one time he was travelling through Perthshire. The Perthshire folk didn't believe at all that he was as strong as all that. There was a big boulder besides the dyke next to the highway. And they said that folk in Perthshire used to lift this boulder as high as their shoes and a few others who couldn't lift it quite so high. They said to the Cameron to try it but he didn't want to.

"Oh," they said, "you're such a coward if you can't manage it."

And he jumped from the highway and he caught hold of the boulder and threw it over the other side of the dyke.

Also from the 25th January, 1951.

He was another time in Perthshire. There was a big boulder besides a dyke and they said that only a powerfully built man would be able to lift it. Alexander went and lifted the boulder and threw it over the dyke where it lies to this very day. I've no idea who would be able to move it now.

It is unclear which stones these stories relate to.

Glen Roy Stones

Clach-neart of Strathmore of Durness

Red Stone (133kg/292lb)

Grey Stone (137kg/301lb)



The Clachan Thogalaich Gleann Ruaidh

At first glance, these inconspicuous stones may not seem to possess the granite symmetry of the Inver Stone nor indeed the druidical quality of the Glen Lyon stone, however the location and indeed the history of these stones are truly remarkable.

The Glen Roy stones are unique in that their location in Lochaber on the west coast mainland make them the first significant historical stones found in this area. Their uniqueness is also underpinned by the fact that Glen Roy was until the 1970's, the last remaining mainland Glen where Gaelic was spoken by all its inhabitants. Sadly only a few remain and it is from this source that the stone was found. The knowledge of the stones is known only to the remnants of this community which has been passed down through generations by word of mouth. There is no written record which is perhaps the norm for those stones still to be found.

Whilst researching the possibility of a traditional lifting stone on the Island of Rhum, I was contacted by Ewan MacDonald of Fort William. Ewan is a MacDonald of Cranachan (not the sweet Highland delicacy but a location in the Glen) and he was able to tell me of the last remaining Gaelic speaking family in the Glen. The Campbell's had resided in Glen Roy for hundreds of years and were able to trace their ancestry to the times of Queen Margaret. The Campbells were the sixth cousins

of Ewan MacDonald perhaps indicative of the breadth of Highland family culture and personal association. It also disproves the myth that the Campbells and MacDonalds were sworn enemies due to the savagery of the infamous massacre in Glen Coe, when indeed this was not the case with the Clan Campbell involvement in the tragedy being well and truly overstated.



The Clach Thogalaich of Glen Roy

On both my prior visits I had in my mind a particular area of the Glen to search. In travelling to that location, I actually past the Glen Roy stone but discounted them as they were far from where I believed they were to be found.

On the 15th August 2011 I made my third visit and decided to trace the Campbell family. I met Angus Campbell sitting outside his house enjoying what warmth the Scottish Summer could provide, and I asked if he could assist in helping me find the stone.

Angus invited me inside and with his wife and sister, all Gaelic speakers, they told me of the location of the stone. In so far that they could tell me of the stone's location, they stressed that they had never informed any non-Gael within the Glen of its existence, not in a manner of being fearful of an anglicised culture but more as a result of respecting the ancient traditions knowing full well that in a number of years that it too may be completely lost.

Why Angus informed me was perhaps down to my own Gaelic background and knowledge of its culture, and over a period of about an hour and half, we shared

stories of strength and legend. It was a remarkable experience and I was told of the times when the stone was lifted.

Angus was able to tell of the days when the crofting community in the Glen was Gaelic and strong and that after a hard day toiling on the land, many of the men would gather around the stone and simply engage in competition with each other. This was a time for telling stories and drinking much whisky which prevailed with many at the end of the day. Some injuries were sustained in lifting the stone but not too the extent that it became a reason for the demise of stone lifting in the Glen. This is purely down to the removal of the community in the times of the Clearances and demise of the Gaelic population locally.

The stone had been lifted for hundreds of years and this continued until as recently as the 1950's. It is surprising to me that this testing stone has lain relatively unknown within the Glen even up to the times of this modern era. The stone was not named and was simply known as the lifting stone, clach thogaliach and its history neither infers or implies any concept or notion of manhood. The stone was simply a lifting stone for testing of strength and the phrase "clach cuid fir" was unknown to them.

Angus reminded me so much of the late PB Martin that I am sure that had he still been alive today, they would both be telling stories till the end of time. I had remarked to Angus who was extremely surprised that anyone would be so interested in the stone, that on occasions I sometimes felt as though I was a tourist in my own country. My own Gaelic speaking culture and history is long lost however when Angus with a gentle pat on the back said "your one of us" I felt truly humbled

The existence of this stone perhaps demonstrates the purity of stone lifting. There are no frills, no firsts, its presence merely a celebration of the strength of a community which is sadly being lost.

The stone itself is made of granite. It has a curious shape in that, what I would consider as its base, is slightly curved perhaps to allow a better fit when lifted onto its small plinth. When stood upright it bares a curious resemblance to the Glen Lyon Bodach however there is ample opportunity for grip. It is not smooth but extremely rough. The chance of finding a well-worn granite egg on the west coast is practically void as water courses in the Highlands running from east to west are extremely short in distance and lack consistent power to mould a stone. The Rivers Tay, Dee and Don etc all run a course from west to east over a considerable stretch and have the ability to create an Inver Stone.

Remember too that the plinth was also known to have been lifted on occasion. The plinth stone is far smoother and extremely prone to a build-up of skin. It would appear to be lighter but would perhaps be harder to grip.



The plinth and alternative lifting stone

As for the test, Angus confirmed that a good lift was one in which the stone was simply lifted to the chest. The classic Ultach style.

The Glen Roy stone is the closest lifting stone to the home of the notable strongman of Lochaber, the great A A Cameron. Cameron resided practically in a neighbouring Glen and in Highland terms the distance would be half a day's walk. Was Cameron aware of the stone or indeed did he lift it? I would answer that it would be an unlikely case for him to have visited and lifted the stone but his knowledge of its existence would be more than probable.

The lifting history of both these stones is scant. However on 25th May 2012 the site was visited by Roger Davies. Estimating the weight of the main grey granite stone in the region of 300 lbs, the rough texture of the stone gives no serious grip problems although the shape of the stone causes its centre of gravity to be offset. Feeling the stone for a while prior to lifting will give the lifter an idea of how to approach and physically hoist it.



First lift of the Glen Roy stone in modern times by Roger Davis

Putting all his stone lifting experience to the test, Roger in his customary fashion took time to get to know the stone, a pull here and a push there feeling for areas of the stone with the best available grip and occasional tugging on the stone to “feel its weight”. After his assessment the stone was lifted into the lap and as befitting a researcher of traditional stones, Roger took advantage to become the first man to lift this traditional stone this millennium and certainly the first in many a long year to do so. The lift was also important as it was the first time that it had been lifted by a non-Scot however as knowledge of this stone is learned others will no doubt follow. As an aside to this historical lift, with no nearby pub to toast this success Roger simply decided to celebrate by a cool refreshing swim in a nearby rock pool of the River Roy.

The plinth stone which was also known to have been lifted is again in the region of 300 lbs. This stone is of red granite and far smoother than the main stone and grip is to some degree more difficult to achieve. It is perhaps a quirk of nature and a pure coincidence that both stones, when standing upright show similarities to the testing stone in Glen Lyon. The second stone was also tested by Roger who managed to put a considerable amount of “air between the lifting stone and the ground”.



The second or plinth stone is beginning to gain some notoriety. On 27th July 2012, the Glen was visited by Alex Roberts of England who repeated the success of Roger in managing a good lift of the Clach Togalaich into his lap. The weather, exemplifying the traditional Scottish Summer was extremely bleak and with almost torrential rain. Alex stepped up to the stone and give it his best effort but only managed to put air between the stone and the turf.

The size and weight of these stones make them a considerable challenge for the lifter, the setting in a remote Highland Glen also adds a certain ambience to the occasion however the true beauty of these stones is that in ancient times they were lifted by men just for amusement and manly competition. These are no frills traditional heavy stones and as simple as that may sound, this tradition should always be retained.

Another stone which is extremely important to the Gaelic community within the Glen is the Communion or Mass Stone which can be clearly seen while driving into the Glen. The stone, which has a carved communion chalice inscribed on its west face stands as a memorial to the persecution of the community by the Duke of Cumberland after the 1745 rebellion. The mostly Roman Catholic community were driven from their homes and only met to conduct mass in the outdoors at this

particular point. Communion was made from this rock by the local priest, who was often disguised.



The Communion or Mass Stone

When visiting the lifting stone within Glen Roy remember the Gaelic Community who once cherished these stones and enjoyed the test of their lifting. Respect the fact that the lifting history of the stone is unwritten, but be proud in the fact that you are by presence alone, retaining some element of a lost culture. More importantly, respect the fact that the Gaels of this Glen have trusted its knowledge to the



View to the wooden bridge with the stones left of centre.

Inverness Stone

Clach-neart Mherichard

Referred to in contemporary press as weighing *18 stone*

114kg/252lb

Editor – Peter did not have an article for this stone. What follows below is pieced together from a series of emails starting in 2014.



Clach-neirt Mheirichard ?

A stone lifting challenge has recently been introduced in to the Inverness Highland Games. This challenge involves loading a round stone over a fixed bar set at 5 feet and is often known as the *stonemason's challenge* in reference to an historic event at the Northern Games.

On the 15th September 1816 there was a lift-and-carry event involving a stone at one of the earliest organised Highland Games. This event was arranged by Alexander Ranaldson MacDonell of Glengarry.

The LIFTING OF THE STONE was next resorted to, and was practiced by the strong (in part) during the interval of the runners' absence; in this; Serjeant Ranald MacDonell, "Na Craig", from Glengarry, maintained his original superiority with great ease; next Allan Macdonell , from Glenlee , carried it 42 yards; Donald MacDonell, from Lundy,30 yards; John Macmaster, from Dockinassy, 28 yards and a half; John Chisholm, from Glenmorrison; 26 yards; Donald Cameron, from Dockinassy, 20 yards - several others tried it, in vain, or declined having their names inserted, from the little hand they made of it, and the well authenticated efforts of John More MacDonell, late of Montcraggie, in Glengarry, and of James MacDonell, "Mac Fear Balemhian", from Abertarff with this very stone, were listened to with pleasure by all and astonishment by many.

Sporting Anecdotes, p.136-7, 1820

This was followed by the more well-known event September 21st, 1822 at another Northern Meeting run by Glengarry.

At lifting the stone – Allan Macdonell, first, as putting over the bar at No.9; Hugh Fraser, second, by doing it with ease at No.8; Ewan Macdonald, from Uist , at No. 7.

The Sporting Magazine, p.41, Volume 9, 1822

It is worth noting that the original stone lifting competition was a *rising bar* or *stone for height* competition, rather than a fixed-height.

There is persistent myth that the winner was an unknown stonemason. This may have stemmed from vague reporting in contemporary reports. For example, the Inverness Courier 10th October, 1822 refers to the winner as a *mere stone-mason*. The same report indicates that the bar height was *more than five feet from the ground*.

There is no doubt that the winner was a stonemason named Allan Macdonell.

Editor: Peter was pursuing the idea that the same stone had been used at both the events (1816 and 1822) organised by Glengarry and that the original stone may be located within the grounds of Glengarry Hotel by the shores of Loch Oich. These grounds include the ruined Invergarry Castle, which was once a seat of the Chiefs of the MacDonells of Glengarry.

He did mention his intention to speak to the owners of the Hotel but I heard no more about it. I subsequently saw a document by Peter in 2014 which had the stone pictured at the start of this section with a question mark beside it.

Unfortunately, I did not ask for more information at the time and do not know what let Peter to believe that this stone may be the original stone used in the Northern Meetings in 1816 and/or 1822.

Newtonmore

Clach thogalaich a baille ur ant- sleibh

101kg /202lb



The Lifting Stone of Newtonmore

The village of Newtonmore is, or was, aptly once known for a lifting stone at its Highland Gathering called “The Stone of Heroes”. The stone is no longer available for lifting and is presently buried underneath the local shinty pitch, which by some incredible quirk of fate is situated only a few hundred yards from this site.

Perhaps the finding of this stone will assist the loss but then again this Clach Thogalaich may well support a stronger history of stone lifting within the Newtonmore community.

In the days of the Highlander and Gaelic culture, death was looked on with a special reverence and many customs and procedures were adopted. Within the vastness of the Highland Glens, special roads were used to carry the coffin of the deceased, often over an extremely long distance, to the nearest burial site. Whilst the coffin was being transported by the local men they would often stop and place the coffin atop a plinth or cairn whilst the cortege would drink whisky and enter into a stone lifting competition. As a mark of respect, large stones were putted or thrown to one side near this coffin stop and evidence of this practice can be seen clearly at the site of the Clach Torastan on the island of Coll. It is also known that the Paudraik plinth stone in Balquhidder was such a coffin stop and to the west of Balquhidder, the lost stone at Monachyle would have sat close to a stop on the lengthy Inverarnan to Balquhidder coffin road.

Identifying a coffin road and its coffin rests or stops can lead to the finding of a traditional lifting stone nearby. In all cases, it was the last stop before the church or graveyard that would normally have a traditional stone and after Sunday Church service, this is the area that the local men would head for to meet up with others and enjoy social entertainment in the form of stone lifting.

On the western fringes of Newtonmore a short coffin road runs from the hamlet of Nuide direct to the graveyard of St Brides in Newtonmore. For the most part the path is straight and there is one spectacular coffin stop, so old that a tree, now considerably large, has grown through the cairned coffin stop. Adjacent to the tree is a large round stone, too large for the cairn and its presence here only cements its purpose as that of a traditional lifting stone.



The coffin cairn split by the tree. The Clach Thogalaich is clearly seen on the left

From the scatter pattern of the smaller rocks, some still lodged within the tree itself, it is clear that cairn would have been at one time a substantial size and its ancient position would have been slightly to the right of the tree. The Clach Thogalaich itself would not have formed part of the cairn as it is too large and even a growing tree would do well to dislodge this heavy stone a distance of some 12 feet.

Neil Ramsay of the Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society is an expert on these traditional paths and is currently gathering information on their use especially in relation to Gaelic Funeral Customs. Neil is of the opinion (as am I) that this large stone could in no way have formed part of the traditional resting cairn and as such, in being the last stop before the graveyard, would have been used solely for the purposes of lifting.

The granite boulder is approximately 240 lbs in weight and has the usual gripping difficulties associated with smooth granite. It may well have been lifted onto the cairn as part of the challenge or probably more likely that style would be the classic “ultaich” lifted into the lap.

When it was last lifted could be easily verified if anyone cares to put an age to the tree but regardless, this old traditional stone would be a fine test with the added bonus of the Dalwhinnie Stone being situated so near.



The Clach Thogalaich and a likely Putting Stone

At these coffin stop sites as previously mentioned, stone putting also took place and there are a number of stones that would not look out of place in a Highland Games Stone Putt event.



Coffin stop and tree from the B9150 road.

As an ancient site please be respectful and avoid the urge to take home a memento of your visit. The history of this site can be clearly read in the positioning of the stones themselves and any removal is a destruction of its history.

On the 25th May 2012 the site was visited by Roger Davies of Hemel Hempstead, England when the stone received its first lift in well over 100 years. Remarking on the smoothness of the stone he was able, due to its irregularity in shape, to secure a sufficient handhold and lift the stone into his lap.

On getting to grips with the stone, Roger noticed some man- made scratching in the form of straight “count” lines. Whether these were done to indicate each time a successful lift was made is pure speculation. Rob Ritchie who is a local man and first person known to have lifted the *Stone of Heroes*, has visited this site and has stated that neither he nor anyone from the village have any formal knowledge of it. This is not surprising as the knowledge of Heavy Stones situated at Coffin Stops on such paths is an aspect of history that is little known in general. Much of the evidence of this stone is purely circumstantial but nevertheless it is quite compelling to the proof of this stones heritage.



Roger Davis lifting the stone



Man made scores on the side of the stone

Editor - The coffin road looks significantly different from when these pictures were taken in 2012. The tree remains the significant feature of the landscape. However, a fence now runs along the right side of the tree and that (new) field often contains sheep.

Stone of Heroes

132kg/ 291 lb

Editor - The story of this stone had not been committed to an article by the time of Peter's passing. Rather, it existed as a series of disjointed emails, phone calls and post-it notes.



Rob Ritchie lifting the Stone of Heroes

The story starts with the original Stones of Strength book written by Peter's father. In the chapter on the Dalwhinnie stone, it states that *this nameless stone [Dalwhinnie] is indeed the smaller sister of the once mighty Stone of Heroes.*

The history of the Hero stone is relatively short but very interesting. Peter was able to establish that the stone had been associated with the Newtonmore Highland Games.

Some initial sleuthing resulted in Peter contacting the Newtonmore Business Association, who gave him the name of a local man by the name of Rob Ritchie.

Unbeknownst to Peter, Rob was an ex-policeman who had a lifetime in sport as a participant and a referee. He had joined the Glasgow police at 19 and was already throwing the hammer for leisure at that time. He continued to throw and compete in to his 60s and participated in the World Master's Games twice (when they were hosted in Inverness). Rob was also described as a legend in the sport of shinty.

No one would describe Rob as an early adopter of technology and he remains without a mobile phone or email address as of 2018 when I called him to discuss the stone. He repeated to me (James Grahame) what he had told Peter.

The stone had been retrieved from an area near the Spey Dam by a friend called Cameron Ormiston in the 1970s. The area near the dam was well known for producing smooth egg shaped stones. It was subsequently used at the Newtonmore Highland Games as a non-scoring event.

Specifically, it was a timed event and the objective was to lift the stone on to a small trestle as quickly as possible. Rob recalled that he was the first man ever to lift the stone. He did so by positioning the slightly pointed end in to the ground and using his long arms to then bear hug it to his lap and then upward to the platform.

In time, two other men were able to lift the stone; they were George and Sandy Cameron. They tended to be quicker than Rob with times around 20 seconds, compared to roughly 40 seconds for Rob.

At its height of popularity, a small group could lift the stone but it defeated most who attempted it.

It will come as no surprise to anyone from Scotland (or Highland Games or shinty) that *alcohol* now makes an appearance in the story of the stone.

With the passage of time, the stone grew in popularity and was especially tempting to young men leaving the beer tent after the games or shinty match. Several injuries lead to the committee suggesting that the stone should be removed to another location to save the men from themselves.

For reasons he still cannot explain, Rob decided to bury the stone in a *safe place* rather than take it home. The shinty pitch was undergoing some renovations at the same time and he took the opportunity to bury the stone under the shinty pitch. It remains under the pitch to this day.

Coincidentally, Peter was also in touch with David Webster who had some stone lifting material to share. During that meeting, Peter found these handwritten notes which confirmed what he had heard from Rob on the telephone.

R.G. RITCHIE

STONE OF HEROES - 291 LB.
GAELIC (CLACH NAN GAELSGEACH)
SAID TO LIE OUTSIDE OF THE
CHIEFS HOUSE AND AS A FEAT OF
STRENGTH THE LIFTER HAD TO
'PLACE THE WIND BETWEEN IT AND
THE EARTH'.

1968-1969.
LIFTED FOR THE
1st TIME BY ROB RITCHIE A NATIVE
OF NEWTONMORE AND HIGHLAND
GAMES HEAVY AND THEN LIFTED ON
A REGULAR BASIS BY THE
WELL KNOWN CAMERON BROTHERS
GEORGE & SANDY ALSO WELL KNOWN
COMPETITORS IN GAMES. HAD TO BE
LIFTED ON TO A STOOL ABOUT
WAIST HIGH IN FASTEST TIME
VERY FEW SUCCEEDED IN

FENCING - PATIOS - KERBING - PATHS SLABBED - GRASSCUTTING

2



R.G. RITCHIE



LIFTING THIS STONE DUE TO ITS
EGG SHAPE AND SMOOTHNESS TO
GRIP. IN THE EARLY 1980'S IT
WAS DEEMED TO BE DANGEROUS AS
AT END OF GAMES ALL SORTS WERE
TRYING TO LIFT IT MOSTLY FROM
BEER TENT. WHEN SHINTY FIELD
WAS RE-DONE AT THAT TIME ROB
RITCHIE BURIED STONE AND YEARS
LATER WHEN GAMES WANTED TO
BRING IT BACK COULD NOT FIND
IT.

FENCING - PATIOS - KERBING - PATHS SLABBED - GRASSCUTTING

I telephoned Rob on the 22nd July 2018 and confirmed as many details as I could. Rob added that the famous athlete Hamish Davidson lifted the stone. Rob recalled the huge strength of Hamish but that he struggled with the stone due to his relatively short arms. Regardless, Hamish succeeded with the lift.

Peter had a similar story regarding Hamish; in that version Hamish lifted the stone in a suit and ripped his trousers in the process.

Also Tony Cohan (Inverness) lifted the stone and by Rob's account he was able to do so in a single motion, with no need to rest the stone on his lap. It was a feat that only Tony was capable of performing.



Unknown lifter beside the trestle table.

Strathmore of Durness

Not yet weighed



Clachneart Strathmore of Durness

*Rugadh mis' anns a' gheamhradh
Measg nam beanntaidhnean gruamach,
'S mo chiad sealladh den t-saoghal
Sneachd is gaoth mu mo chluasaibh*

*I was born in the winter
Among the lowering mountains,
And my first sight of the world
Snow and wind about my ears*

(Rob Donn)

This stone holds the honour of being the most remote traditional lifting stone in Scotland. The history of the surrounding area is the history of the Highlands. Very few stone lifting settings could capture the tranquillity and sadness of this remote Glen.

The area is a fine example of the cultural Gaelic and Norse ethnic mix. Many of the local place names are reflective of this culture. Strathmore is situated in the parish of Durness which means "Point of the Deer" in Norse. The whole geographical county is known as Sutherland, so named by the Viking raiders as it was south of their homeland.

The "Clachneart of Strathmore" is mentioned in page 20 of "An Old Highland Fencible Corps" by Captain IH McKay Scobie (1924).

Shinty or “Camanachd”, wrestling, lifting the “Clach- neart” (Stone of Strength), and throwing the stone and hammer were favourite pastimes in those days. There still lies in Strathmore of Durness, close to the ruins of the birthplace of Rob Donn the Reay Country bard, a “clach neart”, of enormous size and weight, which only an exceptionally strong man can lift. There are two distinct grooves or “grips” on this stone, worn by generations of strong hands seeking to raise it from the ground.

An old highland fencible corps : the history of the Reay Fencible Highland Regiment of Foot, or Mackay's Highlanders, 1794-1802, with an account of its services in Ireland during the rebellion of 1798

The difficulty in finding this stone is exacerbated by the fact that it was probably last lifted prior to 1808. The clearance of the people in this Glen commenced in 1808 with perhaps *the best account of this expressed in “The New Statistical account of Scotland No 4” published in 1834 where on page 84 where the Rev William Findlater comments:*

The only other valley deserving notice is Strathmore, commencing at the north base of Ben Hope, and extending six miles along the river. It is now inhabited by one family; whereas, formerly, it was inhabited by upwards of twenty, by no means affluent, but virtuous and contented.



Strathmore of Durness

This quotation shows how inclusive stone lifting was within the Gaelic communities. With only twenty families, they still possessed a stone of strength. The stone may have had a specific name, long lost, but once again, it is mentioned as a “Clach neart”. As defined as such, the stone would have been expected to have been lifted onto or thrown over a static object such as a dyke wall or standing stone plinth. Close by the existing stone there is an obvious standing stone.



A plinth for the Clach Neart?

The stone perhaps is a marker to indicate the way of the Moine path but the relative flatness (in comparison with the majority of the Glen) of this area, one in which athletic sports could have reasonably have taken place, certainly alludes to the possibility that this three feet high standing stone may well have been the reception plinth.

Today, the Glen has an eerie atmosphere, so quiet and lonely when some two hundred years prior, it was a vibrant, noisy and thriving community where the local men would test their strength on the Clachneart.

The remaining descendants, refer to everything, buildings etc after 1808 as *modern*. The time prior is referred to “as the time before sheep”. The supplanting of sheep for people irks to this day within communities, but those that are descendent from this area are consciously aware that many aspects of their ancestor’s culture too, has disappeared.

Knowledge of the Clachneart in Strathmore was unfortunately a casualty of the Highland Clearances so to positively identify this stone through some existence of local knowledge was extremely difficult. The obviousness of the grips on the stone as well as location are perhaps the best identifying points. However Lindsay Smith, the proprietor of a local Bed and Breakfast at Altnaharra has received confirmation from an elderly local resident, indeed the last person to be born in the Glen, that stone identified is *the* stone.

The stone itself is almost a rectangular block of approximately 350 lb in weight and the underside is particularly flat with the grips mentioned easily discernible.



The less defined "left" hand grip



The better defined "right" hand grip



The Clachneart with the start of the Moine path to the right

The stone is situated in the Strathmore Estate which is owned by Mrs Heather Gow. Permission has been granted for general lifting however visitors should be aware that the estate derived its income from sporting activities such as fishing and game shooting. Due consideration should be given to the activities of the estate and please avoid any form of disruption.



First known lift of the Clachneart Strathmore of Durness by James Grahame.
Note use of the "grip" by the left hand



Martin Jancsics

The Parish of Durness is recognised as being the least populated area of Western Europe but despite this, in the early 1950's a certain John Winston Lennon spent many summers holidaying with his relatives who resided in the area. It was known that Lennon adored Durness and there was mention that prior to his death, he wanted to purchase land in the area. Beatle historians will say the song "In my life" on the "Rubber Soul" album was inspired by his visits to the Parish.

Editor – Peter mentioned a known stone in Achness, Sutherland, close to the Clachneart Strathmore of Durness. I do not know how he came to know this but am certain he never returned to search for it after myself and Martin Jancsics visited Durness with him.

Moray

Clach-neart Glenlivet

Rhindhu Farm.

130kg/286lb

Editor – Peter did not have an article for this stone. What follows below is pieced together from a series of emails in 2013 and my personal memories.



The Glen Livet stone upon its plinth. The stone itself is smooth and oval on one side but flat and ragged on the other. It is unclear if the stone was more roundish in former days.

For once, Peter had no part in the location of a Scottish stone. In this case, the ground work was undertaken by two of his friends. They were a retired lecturer named Malcolm Jones and a mutual friend by the name of David Toovey

Malcolm found the stone via a Victorian Ordnance Survey reference map. He took a trip to the location and - to his amazement - the stone was found to be exactly where the map said it should be.

County of Banff		No. 21. Parish of Inveraven		
List of Names as written on the Plan	Various modes of Spelling the same Names	Authority for those modes of Spelling	Situation	Descriptive Remarks, or other General Observations which may be considered of Interest
Clach Neart	Clach Neart	Thomas Shaw Peter Stewart Peter Lulloch Knochkan	Sheet Plan 11 3	"Pitting Stone" a large Surface Rock on the Convene Muir, The literal meaning of the name is the Stone of Strength.

1867 Ordnance Surveyers report. Referring to the Clach Neart



Corresponding Ordnance Survey map with the text Clach Neart indicating the location of the stone.

Despite that wonderful starting point, access to this stone remained extremely difficult. The location is remote and the stone is located several miles inside the boundaries of a farm.

By July 2013, arrangements had been made with the local farmer who agreed to transport a motley collection of academics, historians, stone lifters and curious onlookers using 2 off-road vehicles. Seatbelts and suspension appeared to be optional as the white knuckle trip began, and continued for much longer than I had hoped for.

There are no roads to speak of and at times I could see no discernible track either. None the less, we arrived at the location to be greeted by a 130kg stone. I felt like I was disembarking from a ship and it took a few minutes to walk-off my sea legs.

After some pleasantries and a recap of the history of the stone, James Grahame and Martin Jancsics became the first known lifters in modern times.



The remoteness of the location.

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 MLO 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 Balquhiddel, 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.

The Chieftain's (Menzies) Stone

115kg / 252lb



As a consequence of this stone suddenly appearing after the release of “Of Stones and Strength” where no mention was made of it, I must admit that my original assumptions were that it was not as old as thought and was perhaps a modern creation, even though the stone was actually used in competition as early as 1994 at the Aberfeldy Games. Fortunately these thoughts have been dispelled and the Menzies Stone is truly an ancient test of strength. A former curator of Castle Menzies assures that there does still exist a Victorian painting depicting Castle Menzies with its stone of strength clearly seen outside the main entrance door which in former times was the door to the east of the newly formed tourist entrance. In 2011 the stone was moved to its present more traditional position.

Not disputing its history, the stone has been previously written about and as early as 1840 we have the following which hints at an alternative name.

Near the door of Castle Menzies may be seen —The Chieftains Stone, a large round block of granite, weighing more than I venture to guess, which the next heir, on succeeding to the supremacy of this Clan, was always expected to carry in his arms upstairs to the dining room, where his health was drunk. It would almost be as easy to lift the house or to run away with Schiehallion (a nearby mountain).

Shetland and the Shetlanders. Catherine Sinclair, p. 318, 1840

Again we have Victorian writers being involved in misconstruing Clan and strength culture. The power of Clan Menzies waxed and waned over many centuries with the original Menzies Stone being a boundary marker located in the bog of the Rannoch Moor indicating that at least one time in history, this Clan were a powerful force. Local knowledge states that the Clan lands extended well into Glen Lyon covering the area where the famous Bodach is located however this said, the powerhouse Clans in this area were the Campbell's of Megerinne and the Stewart's of Garth whom it is known were involved in more than a few skirmishes with Clan Menzies. By the time Clan Menzies located at Weem Castle, now Menzies Castle, their Clan structure and territory was probably insufficiently large to sustain area Chieftains.

I suspect that the lift and carry of the stone, up all those stairs to the dining-room was more than likely to be a test of strength for the Buanachean of the Clan, those men who were full time bodyguards to the Clan Chief and, in comparison to those in employ with far larger Clans, these men may have numbered only two or three. Of course the culture of Gaelic strength would almost insure that other lesser clansmen attempted to lift the heavy stone but the lift and carry as highlighted it must be emphasised fits well into the Gaelic concept of ostentatious of strength, to be attempted only by the exceptionally strong.

It would appear again that Victorian romanticism has again prevailed at the expense of the true culture but nevertheless, the important fact to take from this is that the Menzies Stone is indeed a very old challenge in strength.

Clan Menzies suffered much after the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 which it supported and following on from this, Clan Chiefs were forbidden from having their private armies of strong men. The use of the stone as such would have declined to the point that little if nothing would have been written about it and perhaps the romantic assertions are as a consequence of forgetting its true use.

The stone itself fits well into its location as it is obviously one of those stones located *at the gates of great houses* and as far as being a lifting stone goes, this particular stone is a quandary in strength.

I have always regarded this stone as a “brute” and must admit to being slightly shocked in discovering that its official weight is 250lbs. Being 15 lbs lighter than the Inver Stone I have struggled to account as to why some who can lift the Inver Stone with relative ease can have great difficulty with the Menzies and although the stone appears perfectly spherical it is far from it and has an offset centre of gravity which on flat ground causes it to roll back to find its centre of rest. The trick in lifting the stone is to position the centre of gravity firmly between both feet and to achieve this requires a certain degree of turning the stone and a great deal of personal feel.

Gripping the stone is no more difficult than that of other granite stones however over the years the stone has seen considerable use and the grain of the granite is hardly discernible however lifting stones are judged by the difficulty of lift, not how they look. Its use as a competition stone at the Aberfeldy Highland Gathering has caused a considerable build-up of tacky and it is not uncommon, especially after the games, to see the stone adorned with tufts of grass. It may lack the natural beauty of other stones but it is a brute to lift.



Craig Reid (Australia)

Each August the Menzies Stone is effectively wheeled out (on a specially created trolley) at the Aberfeldy Games and Show for competitors to lift (hard enough on its own) and then carry the stone for distance emulating its original purpose. What is

personally appealing regarding this stone of strength is that although it has an international appeal lifted by many outside Scotland the greatest lifts of this stone have indeed been achieved by the men of strength from Alba.

The first lifts of the Menzies Stone at the Aberfeldy Games in 1994 saw the strength of Bob Simpson (Aylth, Perthshire) dominating for many years until 1997 when Steven King (Inverary, Argyll) set a new record carry of 168ft. In 2006, John Davidson (Glenisla, Angus) set a further distance record of 206ft not bettered until 2012 when Michael Daly (Glenrothes, Fife) broke the existing record in carrying the stone a distance of 209ft.

Perhaps the best known lift of the Menzies Stone however was carried out by Andy Cairney (Glasgow) in January 2011 where the stone was probably hoisted further in its history when pressed over head in a truly ostentatious show of strength.

This stone is the archetypal Pullaid or Pullag, the old Gaelic nomenclature for lifting stones in Perthshire which are orb or globe shaped. Perhaps for this very reason, whereas the likes of the Inver Stone is held with the highest esteem as a lifting stone amongst those inclined to the heavy events at the Highland Games, there is an a definite attraction of the Menzies stone to those involved in Strongman as it physically looks so much like an ancient Atlas Stone. On a personal note I have actually seen more personal failures with those lifting this stone than the Inver Stone although this may well be coincidence but I would rather look at the Menzies stone as one of the most serious strength tests available.

Fianna Stone

Bodach Craigh Fianna or Bodach Craigh Diannaidh

(The old man of the rock of the Fianna or The old man of the rock of defence)

*Bha da chaisteal deug aig Fionn,
Ann an Crom-ghleann dubh nan Clach.*

*(Twelve castles had Fionn
In the dark bent Glen of the Stones.)*



The Bodach

For many stone lifters, this stone is a firm favourite behind the Dinnie Stones and the Inver Stone in Royal Deeside. Probably the undisputed third favourite as for many the stone holds a special blend that incorporates strength, history and location. Here is a quiet and remote setting that allows lifting to be contemplative and at one with nature.

Glen Lyon is indeed a special place. Not only is the Glen known to be the longest in Scotland but its location in the heart of the Highlands makes it more remote than most and the difficulty of navigating the single track road which extends the length of the Glen, ensures that tourist traffic is drastically reduced in comparison with other places. Everywhere you turn in Glen Lyon there is history, whether it be Roman on the east side of the Glen or indeed Pictish on the west, the history between is

somewhat akin to the history of Scotland itself and that means a full explanation of the reason why this testing stone exists.

The first point to emphasise with the Bodach is its name. The stone is not the *Testing Stone of the Fianna* as mentioned in *Of Stones and Strength*. However this has more to do with using an erroneous book reference rather than any specific error of interpretation.

Why the Bodach became to be known as the “Testing stone of the Fianna” is perhaps due to some erroneous texts within “The Country Life Magazine, 5th April 1979” and “Highland Perthshire” by Duncan Fraser (1969). Both refer to the Bodach as “one of Fionn’s testing stones”. Folklore, but untrue and these were the original references used in “Of Stones and Strength”.



Bod or Bodach

The stone is 300 lbs of dolerite, a rock type which due to a high iron content, gives it a higher density than granite meaning that the actual volume of the stone is probably less than that of the Inver Stone but it is indeed heavier.

The shape of the Fianna Stone is difficult to explain. The bulging protrusion on the bottom end of the stone, in most instances used as a grip by the stone lifter, shows obvious signs of being cut by the hands of man. The stone itself appears to have been hand shaped rather than shaped by the action of water on rock and this itself would require the appropriate level of expertise to investigate any further in this respect, but the shape does allude to some substantial difference in the traditional shape of testing stones.

The other aspect of the nomenclature of the stone also adds a degree of authenticity to the stone being truly ancient. The translation to *the old man of the rock of the fianna or defence* provides some evidence to the origin of the stone.

The testing stone, as the name implies is named after the rock of the Fianna or defence. The Bodach is not that rock and indeed the stone is actually named after a prominent hillock situated some 400 yards east of the stone's present location.



The rock of the Fianna or rock of defence

Many modern stone lifters have passed by this hillock whilst searching for the Fianna Stone, completely unaware of its relevance to the stone they are about to attempt. Also located about 100 yards west of the lifting stone, the old Church Manse was built upon the remnants of one of the twelve forts of the Fionn warriors and each of these forts were known to have a meeting place where various judgements were made. These places had usually a high degree of prominence and were elevated areas known to the archaeologist as a *mote hill* taken from the old Danish word moot for meeting. These mote hills exist the entire length and breadth of Britain however in Glen Lyon each of the twelve Fionn forts had their own individual mote hill.

Craigh Fianna or Diannaidh was the mote hill attached to the ancient fort where the old Church Manse at Camusvrachan is now located. The bodach is related to this mote hill.

The final aspect in relation to nomenclature is related to the area where the Bodach is situated. Glen Lyon is centrally located within the ancient county of Perthshire which was known to possess, as similar to other areas, a unique dialect of the Gaelic

language. The people who knew of this stone and the men who lifted it in times when such a test of strength was part of local culture would have called the stone a "Pullaid", a term known to have been applied specifically to this area and perhaps others but certainly was not generic throughout the Highlands and Islands.

Near the rock is Bodach Chraig-dianaidh, a large round stone, which is to be placed on another flat one some feet high. While the seniors were in council grave, the young men, it is probable, were putting their strength to the test in lifting the Bodach. There are at least two other similar stones in the glen - one at Cashlie, eight miles farther up ; and one at Lochs. Fingal, the grey-haired King of Morven, would, it is said, allow no youth to bear the warlike spear, or join the ranks of war until he lifted one of the Bodachs.

The Lairds of Glen Lyon. Privately printed in, p6-7, 1886.

Of what has actually been written regarding the stone, the above text taken from The Lairds of Glen Lyon is perhaps the most informative. Written in that peculiar Victorian romantic fashion, the rock where the seniors were in council is a reference to the mote hill. Whereas any decision relating to the local people in the time of the Clans would be made by the Clan Chief or Chieftain, these decisions would be made without any need or indeed the use of a mote hill. The inference from the text is that the stone, whilst being lifted as a test of strength, while seniors were in council at the mote hill infers that the stone existed well before the formation and regulation of a Clan structure. This indeed would mean that the stone as a test of strength would have been used certainly within the first millennium.

In 664 AD Glen Lyon was struck by the Black Plague. At the time the Glen was being visited on a regular basis by St Adamnan. Adamnan (also known as Eonan) was a culdee, an Irish monk based on the sacred Island of Iona, who like many others was attempting to bring Christianity to the heathen Picts. The folklore ascribes a miracle carried out by Adamnan where standing on the mote hill, he cast out the plague from the Glen by either placing a crucifix into a large rock with a hole in it, or indeed casting the plague into the hole. Like all good folklore, the plague stone still exists and it is situated a short distance east of the testing stone. Factually it is known that St Adamnan separated the infected from those who were clear of the plague and in thus doing so he managed to halt its spread within the Glen.

Adjacent to the mote hill sits an angular standing stone known as St Adamnans Cross which has been inscribed with a rude cross shape to apparently commemorate the event.



St Adamnan's Cross and the Plague Stone

So as the *Old Man of the Rock of Defence* or the *Rock of the Fianna*, the testing stone has an associated history that is indeed ancient in origin. Within this short stretch of the Glen there is an ancient Fort of Pictish origin, a mote hill and standing stone of the same time period as well as many cup and ring marked stones associated with Bronze age man.

How old is the testing stone? No-one will ever be able to ascertain for sure but the evidence that exists does point to having a truly ancient origin.

Having perhaps failed to attach an actual age to the testing stone itself, how the stone was lifted is similarly difficult. In the modern context, it appears that ever since the release of *Of Stones and Strength* there is an apparent assumption that an acceptable lift is simply to lift the Bodach and place it onto the plinth some six inches high.

As a test of strength this certainly would not be too difficult and nor does it compare as a test in relation to other stones.

Throughout this Glen are several remains of strongholds of Fingalian Heroes, and near the Free Church Manse, eight miles up the Glen, is a stone called the *Bodach*, of roundish form, which is said to have been used as the test of strength for young men before they assumed the arms of men. This feat consisted in lifting the *Bodach* and placing it on a flat slab close by, of about 10 inches in height and which still requires the arms of a well-grown man to perform.

Black's Picturesque Tourist of Scotland, Fourteenth Edition, p. 274, 1859

The above text is taken from a well-known Victorian tourist guide book and although it is known that Black chose to travel the length of Loch Tay instead of visiting

Camusvarchan, alluding to his knowledge being obtained by hearsay, the book does state that the lift was simply elevating the stone onto its flat plinth of 10 inches in height. The obviousness of this text is that it infers that the stone was lifted as part of a manhood ritual.

In contrast to this we have the following from some 60 years later -

In the Highlands of Perthshire, there is a famous boulder or roundstone, locally known by the name of the Bodad (Bodach) or old man. It was used as a bit of strength in ancient times. When a young man wished to be numbered among the athletes of the district, he was called upon to lift this stone and place it upon a pedestal of rock beside it, about three feet above the ground.

The Scots Magazine, 1st April 1893, p.397

The inference in this text is that the stone was required to be lifted onto a plinth of three feet in height, a substantial bit higher than that stated by Black. Furthermore there is slight reference to the stone being lifted to prove manhood, but in reality it makes no mention of this simply stating that the lifting of the stone put you into a group of known athletes who lifted the stone. It makes no mention of manhood. Following on from this we have yet again another historical reference:

There are a number of stones in the dale herewith which no ventures to interfere, as each has its tradition, sometimes sacred. One of them was the lifting stone that every man had to raise in his hands before he was permitted to join the bodyguard of his chieftain.

What I have seen while fishing and how I caught my fish. Phillip Geen, p. 227, 1905

Mr Geen obtained the story of the Bodach from his Gaelic speaking ghillie named Peter whilst fishing in a nearby pool of the River Lyon. The text is a direct reference to a known test of strength for the Bunnachean of a clan. Selected for their physical strength a known test of prowess was the lifting of a heavy stone along with other feats of strength.

What the three previous texts actually infer are two specific cultural reasons for lifting this stone. Firstly, a lift of a mere six inches, the equivalent of putting air beneath the stone, a physical test for a youth to prove that he was now physical strong enough for training in weaponry. Secondly, the higher lift is a test to become the warrior elite of the Clan.

In July 2012 a cursory examination of the pedestal was made by removing from the southern side some of the surrounding top soil. Without interfering in any way with the pedestal, it was discovered that on the east side (facing the fence line), the depth

of the rock extends some 2 feet whereas on the west side the depth is a mere 10 inches. The pedestal itself, or rather the solid rock part of it would seem to form an inverted "L" shape with its flat top of the plinth forming the longest part of the inversion. If as is likely, the pedestal stone was placed upon an earth mound of approximately one foot in height then the desired three feet is achievable. Why this is not the case today is more likely to be down to the building of the adjacent road rather than a track through the glen. It is known that the road, or at least the course of it, follows the same line today as it did when Black travelled on it in the 1830's.

As the current plinth height no longer reaches the extent as required by the lifters of yesteryear, an acceptable lift of the Bodach can be any of the two specific lifts mentioned.

Perhaps the best overall reference to the stone is the following. Taken from an unpublished text which was translated from the Gaelic, the story was recited by an old Highlander who was convalescing in England and while doing so tried to give an account of life in Glen Lyon before the advent of Victorian culture.

In regard to strength, the pre-eminence of the biggest man in the Glen was admitted, and boasted of by all the Glen people. But there were many young men from other parts present at the sale who wished to test him in athletic sports, and as the sale continued for two days, and the evenings were long, a competition between the Glen young men and the stranger young men was resolved upon. Now Ewan beat all at the caber and putting the stone, but a stranger was first at throwing the hammer, the elder's John coming second. A stranger was also first in the racing, Diarmad coming second. Duncan Ban, who looked on and felt vexed at the strangers being allowed to beat the Glen youths at anything, cried out when the leaping was going on, and three strangers were taking the lead—Pooh-pooh? these are only foolish things ; try the bodach, which was the test in the Feinne's day for youths who wished to be numbered among heroes.

The bodach was a slippery round stone that had to be lifted on a pedestal some three feet high. It was near the ruins of one of the round towers called "Castulan-nam-Fiann," or "Castles of the Feinne," and the saying was that in ancient times every young man who wished to be enrolled among the Feinne was first called upon to prove his strength by lifting the bodach. It was certainly a severe test, but knack helped strength, and the lithe man succeeded frequently where the heavy strong man failed. It is questionable whether Duncan Ban acted fairly towards the strangers, for he knew perfectly well that practice had made many among the Glen youths perfect in the art of raising the bodach with apparent ease. "But everything is fair in war," was Duncan Ban's maxim, when the credit of the Glen had to be fought for. The strangers accepted the challenge, and were hopelessly defeated. There was not one of them who succeeded that evening in lifting the bodach stone fairly from the ground, far less in placing it on its pedestal. Six of the Glen youths were put forward against the six strangers who had the courage to accept the test, and every Glen youth performed the feat with seeming ease. So the final victory remained with the Glen, and Duncan Ban was highly delighted.

Once more there is a heavy emphasis placed on the antiquity of the stone as well as inference that stone was lifted to prove manhood but again, the stone required to be lifted some three feet from the ground and placed on the pedestal. For the interest of the Highland Games enthusiast, the text is dated from the 18th Century, well before the establishment of the modern Games however as can be read, there is little variation between the modern and ancient. Another aspect to this historic text is the assertion of a “knack”, a know-how and any good stone lifter will testify that strength is part of stone lifting but working out the puzzle of an individual stone is the hard part. Little has changed in 300 years.

Another curious aspect of the lifting style of the Bodach is that all known lifting stones on the Scottish Mainland that were required to be lifted onto a plinth or wall, were known as Clach-neart, the implication with these types of stones being that what can be lifted onto, can equally be thrown over.



Revealing the height of the pedestal

The fact that the Bodach is not known as clach-neart is probably down to the more ancient origin of the stone and indeed the lifting application to it.

In modern times there has indeed been a lifting variant attached to the Bodach. It is not uncommon to find the stone some distance from its plinth lying in the grass amongst a jumble of assorted boulders. Although it would be beyond me to even suggest that visiting lifters have in some way been remiss in returning the stone to its plinth, neither would I suggest that the wind had blown it over. If visiting please

replace the stone on its plinth as it makes identification and the finding of the stone far easier for the stone lifter that follows.

This common faux pas has indeed caused some lifters to lift and walk the stone to its plinth as demonstrated below by Roger Davis. A credible and acceptable lift in itself.



Walking the Bodach

Part of the romantic attraction of the Bodach is the reward for a successful lift. Local folklore states that those being able to lift the stone would be entitled to - *lift the heavy spear of Morven*. Rìgh Mhor-bheinn is Gaelic for King of Morven, the name ascribed to Fingal himself or the legendary Finn McCool as he is sometimes known.

The background to this myth is that success allows you to fight alongside the Fianna but as they are still asleep inside a mountain in either Ireland or Scotland awaiting their call, I wouldn't be standing beside the phone waiting for it to ring and receive your call up. If of course you had lifted the Bodach in the first instance.

There is no known recent or ancient lifting history save one curious story, but very true.

It was known that a local young woman failed to attend the service at Camusvrachan one Sunday morning and decided herself just to wander about the countryside. She came across the Bodach and realising its history she decided that she might have an attempt at lifting it. Standing below the lowest part of the plinth she tugged hard at the Bodach which simply did not wish to be moved vertically and it promptly fell on top of the unfortunate girl. Fortunately she was uninjured but alas the stone had trapped her petticoat and she was unable to extricate herself from the weight of the stone. It was not until the Church service was over that someone heard her cries for help and with some scolding in her ear for failing to attend Church, the stone was removed.

In the summer of 1990 the stone was rediscovered by P B Martin and my-self. After climbing Stuchd an Lochain, a nearby mountain associated with the Campbells of Glen Lyon, we drove to the Camusvrachan area of the Glen and must have passed by the Bodach three or four times in our search (It can be a hard stone to find). Local assistance was sought and the stone was pointed out by an elderly resident who remarked that he had not seen it lifted in many a year. The opportunity was not missed by the late PB Martin.



First modern lift of the Bodach by PB Martin in 1990

Occasionally, the stone is reported as being removed by the local farmer who owns the field but many of these reports are probably as a result of people not being able

to find the stone in the first instance. However I am assured that the stone was only moved once in its recent past in order to facilitate agricultural rotation of the field. In late 2010 the former owner of Slatich Farm sold it to a consortium of Glasgow Businessmen who separated the farm into 6 lots. The field where the bodach sits is fortunately on an agricultural lot and if visiting due respect should be given.

Another curious aspect to this stone is that it is registered with The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) as site number 258512. Contrary to popular belief within stone lifting circles, this registering does not confer any special protection. It is only a record for the purposes of posterity.



Alex Roberts (England)

As mentioned in *The Lairds of Glen Lyon* there are further Bodach's situated at Cashlie and at Lochs. Both these locations are situated in the westernmost part of the Glen where the scenery is bleak but still retaining tranquillity. Having searched both areas thoroughly, I can find no evidence of what could be reasonably assumed to be one of the mentioned testing stones. That is to say they might still exist as there is certainly no shortage of stone in this part of the Glen.

Saddlin' Mare – Sma Glen

99kg /217lb

In this still place, remote from men Sleeps Ossian, in the narrow glen

William Wordsworth on the Sma Glen



The Sadlin Mare of the Sma Glen

Just north of the town of Crieff, on the border between the Highlands and the Lowlands of Scotland, an ancient cattle drove road extends north into the rolling Perthshire Hills passing through the narrow Sma Glen (also known as Glen Almond or Glen Urtach). There is an air of tranquil beauty as one travels into the Sma Glen and with this an immediate realisation that you are now in the Highlands. Many famous poets and artists have travelled here to delight in its obvious beauties including Burns and Wordsworth.

The Sma Glen boasts a unique test of stone lifting strength and ability that is simply called “Saddlin the Mare”.

This stone lifting site was during initial investigation considered to be more a curio rather than a severe test of strength but the knowledge of it as a test has expanded over a few years. The truth is that it may well be one of the severest of stone lifting challenges available in Scotland.

The Mare is the rock plinth which stands close to the roadside passing through the Glen and is hidden by trees for most of the year. The most obvious aspect of the mare is that it has an upper surface that slopes from south to north at an angle of approximately 30 degrees. The lower edge of this slope is over five feet above ground level and slopes upwards to just over seven feet in height. The sloped surface is flat and quite smooth. The stone and plinth were known to a local Church of Scotland Minister who made comment on this particular feat of strength –

We next came to "the saddlin' mear". The "mare" is a tall, druid-like boulder stone, shaped at the top like a sloping desk, and it needs a tall, long armed man to lift from the foot of it a round stone like a cannon ball, and place this "saddle" on the mare's back. If the man himself is not tall, or his arms not long enough, the saddle topples down and makes him jump back, to save his toes. Some of the seniors—and some of the carters—made highly unsuccessful efforts, and were ironically cheered. So we left the mear bare-backed. "*Mere* nonsense to think of it!" came slyly from the sunshade.

Preacher, Pastor, Poet Rev. Thomas Hardy, p.203, 1910.

The above text makes "saddling the mare" appear to be more of a game than a strength activity and the Rev Hardy's appreciation of the activity as "nonsense" would appear to be pretty much in line with Victorian Presbyterian attitudes to ancient tests of strength or anything that appeared to be pagan in origin.

In the summer of 2011 the mare was found with a small rock of approximately 40 lbs sitting proudly on its summit.



What was overlooked at the time was the far larger 200lb stone sitting at the base of the mare. Whatever purpose it fulfilled was unknown but the initial reasoning for its

presence was speculated to have been an aid to make the effort of saddling the mare easier. A step that gave additional height. Later that year the site was visited by James Grahame. James had no problem in placing the 40lb stone onto the plinth and making it stick however the larger stone was of interest.



Saddlin the mare with the small stone and lifting the "step"

The larger “step” stone was duly lifted and most obvious was the large jug handle grip on one side of the stone. The stone appeared to be designed for lifting but again its purpose was unknown.

At this point this would have been the sole history of “The Saddlin Mare” if it was not for the chance finding of a text that throws more light on this unique location.

Clifton Johnson was an American writer who visited the Sma Glen circa 1896. Johnson was celebrated for his writings which on the most part were travelogues in various countries, but in one of his books he makes a rather exciting visit to the Sma Glen, not to see its natural beauty or observe its historical artefacts but rather a desire to see the Sadlin Mare. Johnson describes his visit to Glen Urtach, the more local name given to the Sma Glen and in which he describes with some detail the Sadlin Mare –

Near to the entrance to the Glen were the grassy embankments of a Roman Camp, but a feature of the valley that interested me more than this relic of the dim past was a great boulder about a mile beyond. It stood a little aside from the highway, and a much used path leading to it was evidence that it had many visitors. What the attraction was, I could not have conjectured, had I not heard its story previously. It had a smooth, rounding top, and rose above the ground to a height of seven or eight feet. At its base lay three heavy stones, the largest about the size of a peck measure. It was a common custom among travellers who happened into Glen Urtach to try —Saddling the Mare – that is, to attempt putting the stones up on the boulder. They slid off with surprising ease, and few persons had the strength or cleverness to lodge all three. Still it was allowable to boast, even if you only succeeded with the two

smaller ones. That the sport was a popular one was attested by the battered whiteness of the top of the boulder.

The Land of Heather. p.88-89, Clifton Johnson, 1903



The large saddle

The larger saddle, 200lb in weight and beautifully marked and scraped through the number of times it has been pushed onto the plinth was now wonderfully obvious and without the strange assistance of what in essence was an American Tourist, we would never have known the full extent of this spectacular feat of strength. The problem now was to once again initiate this unique feat of strength and in doing so, ascertain all the relevant lifting difficulties hitherto unknown to the modern stone lifter.

It was not until the 25th March 2013 that the first lifter in modern times arrived to take his chance with saddling the mare with the heavy saddle. Ignoring the snow and freezing conditions, Alex Roberts from England arrived at the Sma Glen and successfully lifted the stone and made it stick to the plinth. It was no easy task.



Alex Roberts of England "saddlin the mare" in difficult conditions

Alex found lifting the actual stone broadways quite effortless, lifting and then placing the stone long-ways onto the plinth was far more difficult. The footing was soft and loose but still effort was required to push the saddle up the sharp slope of the plinth. Having to release occasionally to see if the stone stuck frequently resulted in the stone beginning to slip back and further effort was required to move the stone higher up the slope. Again the stone began to slide and then after one final effort, Alex removed his hand and the stone stayed where it was. Success, well at least for a few seconds as while enjoying the sight of the motionless stone, it slid back to terra firma seconds later which was perhaps inevitable due to the ice and snow. Regardless of conditions this feat of strength (and agility as well as patience) is considerably difficult and if not treated seriously may result in injury if the lifter is careless.

As Alex explains – —The stone itself is around 200lb so not a difficult stone as lifting stones go but no other lifting stone has to be pushed up a smooth rock slope and above head height. When I first encountered this unusual trial of strength, the lifting stone itself was covered in snow and ice and I found myself having to scrape off as much of this as possible so that I could try to figure out the best way to lift it. I managed a couple of small hops with the stone, trying to find the balance point. The stone has a protruding lump on one end of it, very much like a jug handle and this aids the gripping of the stone a great deal but I did find that when using this grip aid, the stone had a tendency to twist or roll away from you when it lifts of the ground so a firm hold with the other hand is required.

When I had the stone in my lap there were no problems in standing up but this where it gets tricky. In hindsight I should have shouldered the stone as a little extra height would be an advantage in getting the stone placed onto the start of the slope. I had

the stone at my chest and had to lean against the plinth and change my grip to get my hands underneath the stone to start the push up the steep slope. This is where a taller lifter would have a definite advantage. Being five foot eight inches in height, I found myself having to fully extend the arms and push with my legs and even with just my fingers at one point. The ground around the base of the plinth slopes away at quite an angle so getting in close is very difficult. I had a few problems getting the stone to stay in position on the slope, ice and snow did not help at all and every time I let go of the stone, it would start to slide back towards me and if I had let my concentration lapse at all, I could have ended up with rather a bad injury. I would not want to visit this stone alone, just in case of any mishaps. I eventually, after much frustration and effort, got the stone to stay in position and allow me to step back carefully.

One contemporary visit to the mare occurred on Wednesday 25th July 1900. During an annual excursion of the - Cults and District Field Cabbage Association - these Aberdonian agriculturalists stopped off at the mare during their horse and carriage tour of Perthshire.

A halt was made at a large stone by the side of the road called "The Mare". It is considered a feat of strength in those parts to be able to saddle the mare. The saddling consists in one man lifting a round stone of about 1½ cwts onto the top of the larger stone. This was easily done by two of the Cults men, much to the amazement of the driver, who had driven on that road for 23 years, he said, and had never seen it done before.

The Dundee Courier Friday 27th July, p3, 1900



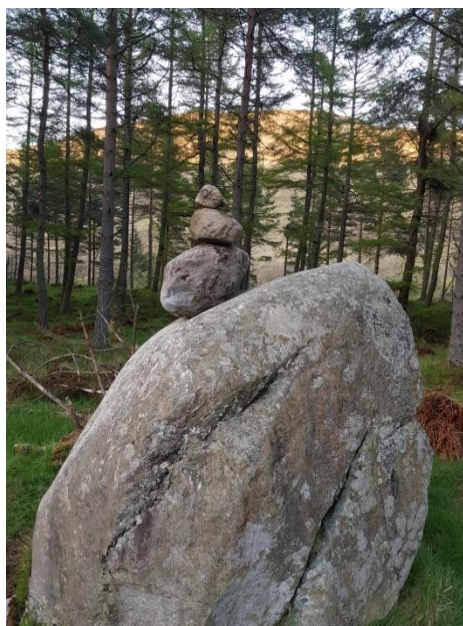
Forestry workers ,Sadlin Mare, 1954 (Photo courtesy of [Jim McIntyre](#) - no 14 in photo)

In the summer of 1953 a group of forestry workers engaged in planting at the nearby Keilour forest stopped off at the Sma Glen. The majority of the men then engaged in saddling the mare to varying degrees of success however by some margin the lift of Ronald MacAulay (No 8) was the most successful when he lifted the stone atop the plinth and made it stick without any requirement to push it.

What is clearly evident from the photograph is the strange array of stones with the smaller stone placed atop the larger. Obviously by this time the third stone as mentioned by Johnson has disappeared and the upper stone does appear to resemble the small stone as delicately placed by James Grahame when the site was initially visited but this too is now lost.

As stated, the jug handle grip on the side of the large stone gives considerable assistance in its lifting. There are no serious grip issues with lifting the stone but lifting it onto the “mare” and making it stay in place is a serious matter which is extremely difficult to achieve. This a more contrived form of lifting the heavy stone on top of a plinth, but a plinth with considerably more height which requires substantial upper body strength to raise the stone to head height. This contrivance from the norm of accepted stone lifting may well have something to do with the locations proximity to the central lowlands of Scotland but it is in itself, a curio of Highland Strength Culture which has been replicated nowhere else and again proves the point that in Scottish Stone Lifting, there is no generic or standard that was applied throughout the country.

One would be expected to think that the mare is well known locally however the converse applies and it appears that as the conifers year by year grew around the mare the memory of it as a place where strength was tested also sadly disappeared



Wallace Putting Stone

125kg / 275lb

About two miles south-west of the village of Blackford, on the Sheriffmuir road, and near to the farm-house of Easter-Biggs, is an arch of stones, seven in number, called the " Seven Stanes," varying from perhaps a ton to two tons each. One of these is of a round prismatical shape, and stands in an erect position. Beside these lies a large bullet of stone, called " Wallace's Puttin' Stane," and he is accounted a strong man who can lift it in his arms to the top of the standing one, which is about four feet high,—and a very strong man who is able to toss it over without coming in contact with the upright one. At one time few were to be found of such muscular strength as to accomplish this—not so much from the actual weight of the stone itself, as from the difficulty of retaining hold of it, it being very smooth and circular. This difficulty, however, was obviated about seventy years ago, by the barbarous hand of a mason, to enable himself to perform the feat, since which time a person of ordinary strength can easily lift it.

Dunblane Traditions, John Monteath, p. 5-6, 1887



Left: the recumbent plinth Right: Putting Stone (125kg/275lb) with fracture showing



Wallace Putting stone

Local knowledge of this stone is virtually non-existent and it is fortunate that the text in *Dunblane Traditions* was sufficiently detailed as to allow formal identification of the stone.

The putting stone lies close to an obvious plinth in an area totally devoid of any other suitable matching stones. There are two obvious “chisel marks” on one side of the stone. And on the other (snub end) of the stone, the section that was cut off circa 1807 by the over-zealous stone mason is quite obvious

The smaller piece that was removed by the mason was found a short distance from the larger stone. The shape, size and colour of which clearly indicated they were previously one single stone.

When examining the large stone in detail, it would appear that the stone was weakened by the mason when he altered it. There is an obvious hairline fracture which may cause problems if the stone is abused in its lifting (i.e. dropping it to the ground).

The location of the Wallace Putting Stone, in what is still considered the lowlands of Scotland, does afford us some speculation as to its age.

Firstly, the region is littered with stones associated with William Wallace. Whether reality or folklore, many stones were placed (or named) to remember a victory by Wallace over the English in this area. Specifically, his famous victory at Stirling Bridge (September, 1297) in what is known as *The First War of Scottish Independence*.

Secondly, the 1715 battle of Sheriffmuir during the Jacobite uprising may also indicate the age of this stone. Highlanders who were encamped locally for some time prior to engagement could have created this feat of strength. Regardless, as to whether the Wallace Stone is 800 or 300 years old, it is truly a traditional test of strength with an ancient origin.

Lifting The Putting Stone

In the absence of an upright reception plinth, a formal lift would be regarded whereby the stone is lifted into the lap. That said, perhaps the name of the stone itself gives some indication of how a lift was originally approached.

Although cinematically portrayed as a belted plaid Highlander, William Wallace was in fact from the lowlands and there is uncertainty whether he was actually born in Ayrshire or Renfrewshire. Some aspects of his life are known, especially when he was younger and resided in Lanark.

The Wallace was a strong man who excelled at most sporting events however it is recorded that he excelled at Putting the Stone. Such stones would not be as used at the contemporary Highland Games but would be heavy stones thrown for distance.

While in Lanark, it is recorded that William Wallace participated in throwing the heavy stone in competition with soldiers of the English garrison based at Lanark, but this fact perhaps underlines that stones of strength were also popular amongst those in Southern Britain. The Wallace Putting Stone is simply what it says it is.

It would be fair to state that the importance of the plinth cannot be overstated in that the actual name of the stone - *putting stone* - is derived from the fact that the stone was required to be lifted and then thrown over the plinth (*the putt*).

I would stress however that the fracture caused by the stone mason all those years ago should deter such behaviour. The potential for the stone to split along this existing weak spot is too great to risk.

It may be prudent to assess a good lift as one where the stone was simply lifted into the lap, and as a thoughtful stone lifter always does, returns it to earth with ease.

Editor - It should be noted that subsequently Peter informed of a second (smaller) stone at Sheriffmuir but I have not seen his independent references to it. Also, at some point after 2013, the bullet part of the larger stone that had been removed by the mason could no longer be located.



The Smaller stone at the location of the Wallace Putting Stone. History Unknown

On 26th May 2012, Roger Davies of Hemel Hempstead, England visited the site as part of the research for Peter's book. Roger's successful lift was the first for a period far larger than 100 years.

The stone itself is located not far from the Tullibardine Distillery, Blackford, Perthshire on the opposite side of the A9 road.

Ross and Cromarty

Dripping Cave Stone

120kg / 264lb



The Great Stone of The Dropping Cave 120kg / 264lb

In an analysis of traditional Scottish Stone Lifting, its origins and its cultural development, it is quite clear that there are indeed a large number of factors that result in variation, in not only the type of stone that was lifted, but also the actual location of a stone. The Great Stone of the Dropping Cave is certainly situated in the most unusual of locations and is unique for many other reasons.

This said, the Dropping Cave Stone or rather its history, does not surround the stone itself but is in fact the story of a troubled genius who in the annals of Scottish history is revered amongst the greats who, pushed the boundaries of scientific investigation.

Hugh Miller was born in Cromarty on the Black Isle peninsula in 1802. His school years showed that he had great promise as a writer however in later years he was to

deride the harsh and repressive teaching methods that he was submitted to and it is from this experience we learn of the Great Stone of the Dropping Cave.

In his book *My Schools and Schoolmasters 1854*, p.144 he refers to his tutoring and to his frequent beatings at the hands of his schoolmaster by stating

I was mauled in a way that filled me with aches and bruises for a full month thereafter. I greatly fear that, had I met the fellow on a lonely road five years subsequent to our encounter, when I became strong enough to raise breast-high the "great lifting stone of the Dropping Cave", he would have caught as sound a thrashing as he ever gave to little boy or girl in his life.



Hugh Millar

After leaving school, Miller in essence self-educated to a high academic level, producing various books on the study of fossils as well as Geology and it was he that pioneered the theory of an ancient earth that was inhabited by species that had long

been extinct. Although he was a man of genius, his first job, given to him by a relative was that of an apprentice stone mason. This was an employment that he didn't altogether take to but he did acknowledge that it made him strong as stated in the following text.

I was at the time of slender make and weak constitution; and I soon found I was ill fitted for such employments as the trundling of loaded wheelbarrows over a plank, or the raising of huge blocks of stone out of a quarry. My hands were soon fretted into large blisters.

Taken from the Life and Letters of Hugh Miller by Peter Bayne, p. 55-56, 1871.

I am sure that the stone lifter who trains hard will be able to sympathise with the injuries sustained by Miller however it is the practicalities of living and earning sufficient to exist that made him strong. Clearly, through time he gained in strength and was quite adept at showing it.

He speaks of:

raising breast-high the great lifting-stone of the Dropping Cave", near Cromarty – a feat which those who have seen the stone will be able to appreciate better than we can; and he speaks also of being able, as a mason, being able to raise weights single handed which usually required two men

The Eclectic Magazine, foreign Literature, Science and Art, p.294, Sept to Dec, 1854,

It is clear from this reference that there is indeed "a Great Stone of the Dropping Cave" however the knowledge of it has long been forgotten by the present community of Cromarty.

Hugh Miller himself gives us an indication of the whereabouts of the stone. In *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland* published in 1834 a whole chapter is practically devoted to the infamous "Dropping Cave" where the legend and myths surrounding it are eloquently explained. The description given by Miller of the cave has changed little over the years and he explains how a stone can be dropped into the narrows of a stank in the deepest part of the cave. He makes no mention of the lifting stone as quite simply, the cave is dark and extremely wet with insufficient room to stand up let alone lift breast high a large stone. From what evidence that is available, the Great Stone of the Dropping cave does not sit inside the cave but sits outside it.

Roger Davis and my-self, made a visit to the Dropping Cave On 25th May 2012, a visit slightly hindered by a North Sea Haar which made locating the cave and the stone slightly more difficult than anticipated. Perhaps overwhelmed by the unique Cave scenery and architecture and even in considering that the most likely location

of the lifting stone would be outside the cave, like moths drawn to a light, the cave required to be explored. Before entering the cave, the obvious large roundish black stone situated near to the entrance was conveniently overlooked while the prospect of the stone being found within the cave remained a possibility.



Dropping Cave Stone

We both examined the immediate area outside the cave mouth and the obviousness of this large black stone was overwhelming but the allure of the cave itself was more so. Roger entered the cave, the entrance to which constantly seeps with water making its alternative name of “Dripping Cave” thoroughly apt and understandable. A rope of some age allows someone to simply pull themselves in to the confines of the cave. Inside, it is dark, dank and extremely wet and certainly confining enough to ensure that “The Great Stone” was never lifted within its restricted space. One of the stank entrances mentioned by Miller is clearly obvious and with the allure of a secret chamber, Roger made a sustained effort to push himself inside with the only consequence being that he was becoming even more saturated with each attempt.



Inside Dropping Cave

Roger Davis is arguably one of the World's most experienced of Stone Lifters having been privileged to lift the traditional stones of Iceland, Spain, Wales and indeed Scotland and when he says *this is THE most atmospheric stone lifting site in the UK*, one can quite understand why in a certain manner that we both left the location without a full examination of the stone.



The site is surrounded in an incandescent eerie purple glow which is offset by the yellow and orange colouring of mineralised mud oozing from the cave mouth entrance. One would half expect one of the many fossils discovered by Hugh Miller in his research, to simply come alive such is the prehistoric feeling that this site emanates.

In the days of Hugh Miller, it is quite understandable that this area would have had a degree of prominence, a meeting place and perhaps “The Great Stone of the Dropping Cave” was, like so many other traditional Scottish Lifting Stones a local test of strength. A stone lifted by not only Miller but others of the locality as well as a release from the monotony of daily chores.

The area of the Black Isle does indeed have a culture of strength that was functional as well as competitive.

Donald Hossack a Chelsea Pensioner, was born in Cromarty in 1935. Donald recites tales as told to him by his father of local farm hands, in the early 1900’s when time permitted, of practicing and indulging in contests of strength by throwing the 56 pound weight for distance and height. The men needed to be strong for their work, this was the practical nature of their strength but for amusement, almost on a daily basis they would apply that strength to test each other in competition.

This aspect of late Victorian culture permeates throughout all regions of Scotland of the time and many of these farm hands went onto participate in the emerging Highland Games Circuit.

It is perhaps a sad loss that the “Great Stone of the Dropping Cave” can no longer be formally identified by a Cromarty local as the stone lifted by Hugh Miller. Rest assured, what has been shown circumstantially certainly points to a conclusion that the stone lifted by Hugh Miller is the stone which sits outside the entrance to the Dropping Cave and only a visit to this site will allow the feeling of this to be truly appreciated.

Such is the allure of this site the stone was visited by Martin Jancsics of Elgin on 12th June 2012. Having been provided with scantest of details surrounding the stone, Martin himself noticed the obviousness of the lifting stone as it sat close to the entrance of the Dropping Cave.



The stone is a smooth 320 lbs irregular shaped boulder that has a deceptive symmetry and despite its difficulties, Martin was able to shoulder the stone.

The Great Stone of the Dropping Cave will always be associated with Hugh Miller. There is an abundance of literature written regarding his life and work and in most of this, his “immense strength” is frequently highlighted but not expanded on, but perhaps the lifting of this stone will highlight the memory of the physical attributes of Miller himself.

The town of Cromarty itself has a rich history and is well worth visiting for a walk amongst the mix of Victorian and Georgian houses that give it an historical air. The town also houses the Hugh Miller Museum which is worth visiting to learn more of this remarkable man of words and strength.

Stone of Lealty (Testing Stone of Clan Munro)

Alness (30 miles north of Inverness)

Editor – The information regarding this stone is pieced together from emails.



Finlay Munro 1950

In the green plot outside is a large water-worn boulder, said to have been the lifting stone of the Munroes of Lealty. According to the story, these Munroes possessed great physical strength, and the young men of the family used to lift this stone about a foot and a-half from the ground. The statement seems hardly credible, for the stone appears to weigh about four hundred weight. Still, it is possible to be too unbelieving. There may have been some peculiar way of lifting the stone by which art was brought to the assistance of muscular strength.

Transactions of the Inverness Scientific Society and
Field Club: Volume 2, p. 320, 1880

There is to be seen at Lealty House, the lifting stone of the old Munros of Lealty. It is of granite, globular, 2 feet in diameter and weighs 7cwt. It is said, on the occasion of the sons of one of the Lairds of Lealty and the heir of the Laird of Tollie, on the opposite side of the river, trying feats of strength, that the heir of Tollie injured his spine in trying to lift the stone. His father complained to the Laird of Lealty, who during the following night got the stone removed to Lealty burn and sunk it into a deep pool. His sons, having missed the stone the following morning, made a quiet search for it, restored it to its former place, and there it now rests, bidding all observers defiance to lift it.

Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, Volume 14, p. 224, 1889

Peter was able to contact a descendant of the man in the picture. He confirmed that he was aware of the stone but not its current location. His best guess was *around Rockfield* near Portmanhomack

South Ayrshire

Blue Stones of Old Dailly Stone

Editor - The Blue Stones of Old Dailly are both a very complicated and very simple story. They were strapped to a wall in March 2001 by South Ayrshire Council on the advice of Historic Scotland and have been unavailable to lifters since that time.

Peter campaigned for their release on the grounds that they were historic lifting stones and he questioned the reasons, and accuracy of the information, used to justify the stones being strapped to a wall in the first place.

I still have a copy of his 97 page submission to the council as part of his campaign.

I received an email from Peter dated 22nd September 2011 where he states *just to let you know that I received a telephone call from South Ayrshire Council today.....The Blue Stones of Old Dailly are to be released. The council wish to discuss with me various ways that the stones can be marketed and lifted. This may mean that a contact number is phoned before lifting but it can in any case also include a log.*

For reasons that remain a mystery to me, the stones remain strapped to a wall. I still hope that the stones will be released one day and I don't want to prejudice that possibility by publishing anything that I would come to regret. In many ways I hope by publishing his work here it may give momentum to another campaign to have the stones released.



Within the square enclosure attached to the north wall of Old Dailly Church, and which is probably the ancient and disused tomb of the Boyds of Trochrague, lie two blue stones. For ages they have been used as tests of strength, the difficulty of the lift being increased by the smoothness and roundness of the stones. They appear however, to have a history and associations which give them stronger claims on our interest. It may not be generally known that one of these stones is referred to as a “charter stone” in the notes to Sir Walter Scott’s “Lord of the Isles” Sir Walter was indebted for this information to Mr Joseph Train, of Newton Stewart author of some verses illustrative of Galloway and Ayrshire traditions, who at his request, travelled in Ayrshire to collect materials for notes to the poem.

Extract from “A South Ayrshire Parish” by Rev George Turnbull, 1908

In the correspondence relating to the stones the following estimates are given. *The larger of the two stones weighs between 290 and 320 pounds and the smaller between 260 and 280 pounds in weight.*

Stirlingshire

Abbot Stone

Located near the Pudrac (plinth) at Balquidder.

Donald MacLaren of MacLaren has his own stone of strength located outside the door to his cottage and is named the Abbot Stone after its 6th century originator. The Abbot Stone has been used recently at the nearby Lochearnhead Highland Games and a number of visiting stone lifters have, on asking for permission, been cordially welcomed and given an opportunity to lift the stone. The stone is modern of course with the ringed handle been attached to it by stone lifter/blacksmith Stan Pike.



Beinn Uird

A remarkable hill feature standing above "Blairvokie" & "Rowardennan" on the edge, or in line with the edge, of the heights which fall to Loch Lomond. The east side falls to and forms part of "Gleann Meadhonach". "Uird" signifies hammer or mallet, which, it is said, is the derivation from young men in former times going there to throw the hammer from the market or fair which tradition says was held at the Stone called "Cloch an Iaruinn" at the head of Glen Meadhonach

Stirlingshire Place-names, Volume 6, p. 101, 1858-1861

Cloch an Iaruinn

This Name & the Stone are well known from being in former times the place where hardware was laid out when a fair or market was held here.

Stirlingshire Place-names, Volume 6, p. 97, 1858-1861

The references are mid Victorian so the inference again is a sporting meet pre Games and post 1746. The map for the locations again show that the fair and sports were held almost on the Parish boundaries, in this case between the Parishes of Buchanan and Aberfoyle.

Another weird point to the reference is that Beinne Uird is clearly seen from Luss. I wonder how many heavies throwing the hammer would realise that centuries ago it was being replicated half way up a hill on the other side of Loch Lomond.

Puterach and Pudrac Stones



The Puterach and Pudrac

Nestled within a long east/west orientated Glen, the scenic village of Balquhiddy (pronounced Bal-whiddy) is a well-known tourist destination with much of its popularity as a result of its ancient church and graveyard being the (supposed) resting place of that archetypal Highlander, Rob Roy McGregor. To the southeast of the church and far lesser known lies a standing stone of antiquity. Known as the *Pudrac* it is regularly visited by archaeologists and examined with many assertions and speculations as to its original purpose with the only concrete fact attributed to it being, that the eastern aspect of this wedge shaped stone directly faces sunrise each morning.

The *Pudrac* certainly dates to a time well before the creation of the country of Scotland itself but the standing stone did, during the time of the Clan system in the Highlands, have a special purpose and that was as a plinth stone to receive a lifting stone known as the *Puterach*.

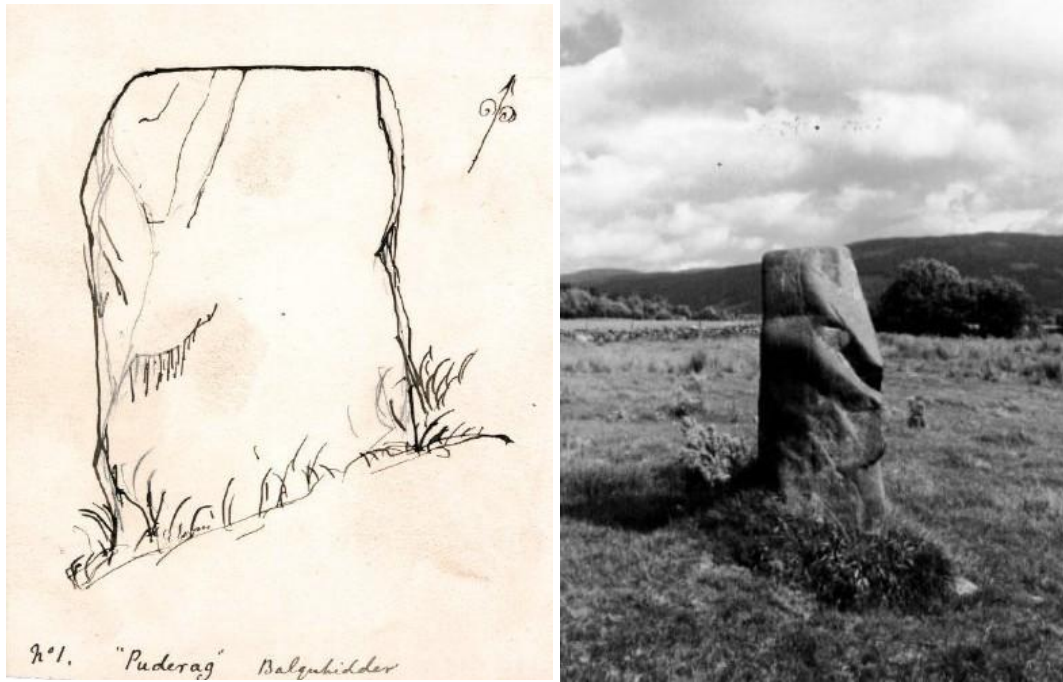
The use of a reception plinth is not unknown in the practice of strength and certainly stones lifted in Strongman and Highland Games competitions are known worldwide

to be lifted onto either metal frames of wooden barrels however the Pudrac is the reality and not the fabrication.

Further east, and on the same side of the road, overlooking the strath, there is another knoll, which in later times was the gallows hill of the district, and is still known as " Tom na Croich." On the level ground below this knoll there is a prominent monolith, standing about 4 ½ feet above ground, quite flat, on the top. It is shaped like a wedge, with the edge to the east, and is famous in Balquhiddy as the place where trials of strength took place. A large round water-worn boulder, named, after the district, "Puderag," and weighing between two and three hundredweight, was the testing stone, which had to be lifted and placed on the top of the standing stone. There used to be a step about 18 inches from the top, on the east side of the stone, on which the lifting stone rested in its progress to the top. This step or ledge was broken off about thirty years ago, as told to me by the person who actually did it, and the breadth of the stone was thereby reduced about 8 inches. This particular mode of developing and testing the strength of the young men of the district has now fallen into disuse, and the lifting-stone game is a thing of the past. A former minister of the parish pronounced it a dangerous pastime. Many persons were permanently injured by their efforts to raise the stone, and it is said that he caused it to be thrown into the river, but others said it was built into the manse dyke, where it still remains. There were similar stones at Monachyle, at Strathyre, and at Callander, and no doubt in every district round about, but the man who could lift " Puderag " was a strong man and a champion.

Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, Volume XX1,-Page 84
Notes on Balquhiddy , James Gow ,1887

There is good evidence to show that land movement around the Pudrac stone hints at the traditional east approach being the easiest lift during the Victorian period. The drawing below, made by Gow in 1885 shows the highest aspect of a lift to be made was from the west and not the east. The approach from the east today is by far the hardest with the greatest height for the stone to be lifted and the contours of the land making getting close to the plinth extremely difficult.



Land movement in well over a century would have to be taken into consideration as the actual site is a flood plain and correspondingly, land heights would be expected to change over a period of time. In comparison, the 1986 photograph shows some differences in the height of the surrounding land with that at present however there is some dubiety over the east approach as stated by Gow. There is an obvious broken section, the resting ledge as inferred by Gow, clearly seen on the west side of the plinth with the east side almost completely devoid of protrusions; in fact it is almost sheer. Was Gow meaning that the lifter faces east in his lift, or did he make his approach from the east? The west approach at the time of Gow would appear to have been the far more difficult lift in relation to the height the Puterach was lifted but which today is the complete reverse.

Regardless of what is seen as traditional there is no doubt the stone would have been lifted from all four sides and with varying degrees of difficulty as a consequence. This is traditional stone lifting where standardised is an imaginary word.

One fact that Gow was unfortunately correct on was his account of the demise of the Puterach stone itself. Whether it is in the Manse dyke wall, probably by the account of the present occupier one of the most inspected walls in Scotland or whether it is in the nearby river is of little consequence, the stone is no more.

On the 22nd August 2011, Johnny Reed from Georgia, USA became the first lifter to place a stone on top of the Pudrac in over 160 years. This was followed a week later by roger Davis loading from the traditional east side.



Johnny Read (USA)



Roger David (England)

Editor - In 2011 a replacement stone was sourced by Peter. It was placed at the plinth with the agreement of the landowner. The surrounding locations of Monachyle, Callander and Strathyre were also known to have had testing stones in the past. Current locations are unknown.

Ireland

An old man wanders through the outskirts of his town. Pains creep up and down his body as he begins to reminisce about the days of his youth and the achievements of long past. Memories flood his mind of friends, family and associates long gone. Just as his past seems to slip away, he stumbles across a physical reminder of this soon to be forgotten time... a stone. This stone, unlike the dozens surrounding it, is no ordinary stone. Larger and heavier than the rest, this stone was part of the old man's greatest feat.



At a wedding many decades previously, a challenge had been issued to the men of the town. Who could lift the village stone to chest height? Dozens had tried but the old man alone succeeded in raising it to chest height and even kissing it three times for good measure. Because of this, he was lauded for his strength and prowess. He was talked about with respect for years to come and upon his passing, he was remembered as a man of strength. Like his counterparts in Scotland and Wales, the man's stone lifting feats had proved his masculinity, his transition from mere boyhood into adulthood.

Far from an isolated figure, this fictitious man, a creation of Liam O'Flaherty in the 1930's, was representative of dozens before him. He symbolised a strength culture in Ireland far removed from the gymnasium, village fair or the vaudeville stage. This strength culture was found predominantly in the rural parts of Western Ireland, amongst small groups of men seeking to prove their masculinity. Though these men left few records, an eclectic combination of folklore, place names and literature reveals the breadth of strength cultures in nineteenth-century Ireland. Seeking to do justice to this phenomenon, this section explores the practice of lifting heavy stones during this time, in a bid to uncover the pursuit's significance. Unfortunately, the history of stone lifting in Ireland is still in its infancy as searches for the historic

stones used over countless centuries have thus far proven fruitless. While work is currently being done in this area, most notably by Stevie Shanks of Dinnie Stone fame, current discussions of stone lifting in Ireland are forced to rely upon secondary accounts which are largely steeped in folklore or mythology. Though existing on the margins of Irish sporting history, this informal but still competitive feat was laden with social importance and intrigue.

Stone Lifting in Ireland

Unsurprisingly for an island nation, stones have long held a cultural importance within Irish folklore and mythology. Indeed two of the better-known stories told to Irish children from a young age are those of Fionn McCool and Oisín. Fionn mac Cumhaill (or Finn MacCool), was a mythical Irish warrior, who interestingly also appeared in Scottish and Isle of Man mythologies. Revered for his bravery and strength, McCool's exploits were said to have extended even to stones. Challenged by the Scottish giant Benandonner to fight, Fionn supposedly built the causeway stone by stone as a bridge to Scotland to meet his foe. While the story diverges from that point, the ethos behind the tale is nevertheless important. Faced with a divine act of nature, Irishmen and women linked stone structures and the lifting of heavy stones to men of strength and courage. The Giant's Causeway is this, the first indication of the stone's importance to Celtic culture in Ireland.

The second mythological hero, Oisín, was a warrior equal to Fionn in strength and bravery. Brought to Tír na nÓg (the Land of the Young) by a fairy who loved him, Oisín resided in this otherworldly place for several centuries before the pull of his own land brought him home. Told by his lover that he could temporarily return to Ireland provided he did not touch the soil, Oisín set out from the Land of the Young. Unbeknownst to Oisín, three hundred years have passed. Back in Ireland, the hero comes across several men struggling to build a road. Bending down from his horse, Oisín scoops a heavy stone up with one hand but in doing so falls from his horse and touches the ground. Instantly he ages before the men and his return to Tír na nÓg becomes impossible. Again fictitious, the story's underlying message proves important. Stone lifting was an activity for the youth and the youth alone. While not historically verifiable, such stories nevertheless tease at a cultural importance surrounding the stone and the lifting of the stone. Aside from mythology, stone lifting has influenced the naming of regions itself. Thanks to the arduous work of Peter Martin, who has done more than anyone to highlight Ireland's stone lifting past, it is now clear that Cloghnart in Co. Monaghan was named after the practice of stone lifting. Cloghnart or Cloch-neirt roughly translates as 'The Stone of Strength', a hint at the pastime's enduring popularity there.



The Giant's Causeway Courtesy of Fionn McCool

Place names and mythology, while informative, are not the only sources available to us however. Though stories of stone lifting rarely appear in newspapers, diaries or memoirs, Irish folklore does reveal further instances of stone lifting. For issues of convenience, at least historically, it is easiest for the historian to focus primarily on the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century in Ireland when discussing this phenomenon, owing to the scant but profitable sources in existence elsewhere.

While the world of Irish literature has proven one interesting avenue, the Irish Folklore Collection (henceforth I.F.C.) is undoubtedly the historian's ally in this quest. Collected by Irish schoolchildren during the 1930s, the I.F.C. represented an effort on the part of the Irish government to preserve the memory and stories of regional towns around Southern Ireland. Digitized now through Duchas.ie, the collection covers everything from folk remedies to parochial disputes. Included in this of course, are stories of strong men and their feats.

Often under the heading of 'Local Heroes' or 'Strong Men', the Irish children recounted stories from their parents, grandparents and neighbours from decades gone past. Safe in the knowledge that my own grandfather fabricated many of his own entries as a participant of this project; it is worth noting at this point the need for historical scrutiny in examining these stories. Embellished or fact, the stories nevertheless highlight the intrigue befitting the subject.

At Drummond in County Carlow, Richard Gladney recounted the tale of Andrew Neill, who lifted a large stone into a nearby ditch. So legendary was Neill's strength that *it is said that as many as four hundred people used to come every Sunday to try and lift the stone. But it was never stirred from where Andrew Neill put it.*

In Ros Nuala in Donegal, a giant stone lay near the village. Supposedly a remnant from a previous battle between giants, similar in a sense to the story of Fionn McCool and Benandonner, the stone proved itself immovable to the many townsmen who sought to test their mettle against it.

Other stories spoke of Cormongan in Co. Leitrim which boasted the Prevago Stone, a stone so heavy that only one man amongst two hundred could move. Finally in Kildare's aptly-named Bigstone we have the following story of a very strong man lived who in Castledermot. Such was his strength and athleticism that he was said to have won 200 prizes for lifting weights.

One very hard winter came. He was speaking to another man on the road and the man told him that he would be a strong man would live until the end of that winter. He wondered at all the people dying around him. In the distance he saw some little men trying to lift a big stone. After a while all the little men died except one of them. The stone fell on him and crushed him to death. The strong man went over and threw the stone over his head.

Surveying this brief snapshot from the Folklore Collection highlights some rather interesting things. First it's clear that stone lifting in some form or another was indeed a competitive event for men of the town. In his 2015 work on Irish sport (*Sport and Ireland: A History*), Paul Rouse spoke of Irishmen and women's inherent love of play and competition as a driving force behind their interest in sport and physical activity. Though Rouse was concerned with activities such as hurling or soccer, his insights can be extended to Irish stone lifting. Indeed a common theme throughout the Folklore Collection is the regularity with which large numbers of men sought to test their mettle against heavy stones as part of a broader competition amongst locals. Accompanying this is the implicit mystique given both to the stones themselves and also the men capable of lifting them. Many stones were said to have come from the time of giants and fairies within Ireland. The men capable of lifting them were presented as Herculean. We see then an idealisation of the stones' past and also a valorisation of the 'heroes' capable of lifting them. Certainly this was the case in Donegal's Gartan Abbey, where the local practice of lifting heavy stones was described thusly

Over at Gartan Abbey you can see a stone. If you lift this stone three times and leave it down again whatever request that is asked will be granted. It is a very heavy stone...

Stone lifting in Ireland was thus heavily imbued with mystique and historicism. Returning to Liam O'Flaherty's short story mentioned in the introduction we learn that

It was a great day in each young man's life when he raised the stone from the ground and 'gave it wind' as they said. And if he raised it to his knees, he was a champion, the equal of the best.

And if he raised it to his chest, he was a hero, a phenomenon of strength and the men talked of him. Whereas, he who failed to lift it from the ground became the butt of everybody's scorn. It had always been so, from the time of the most remote ancestors of the people...

This practice, far removed from the playing pitch or the comfy confines of the gymnasium, carried with it a social and gender importance. In the first instance, the act of lifting the stone was a public ceremony. Men and women spoke of it in the town, and as evidenced by the I.F.C., spoke of it many decades after. Lifting the stone was thus an important way of earning or maintaining the respect of one's neighbours. Furthermore it was a way of proving one's self as a man. Echoing O'Flaherty's belief that it was a great day in a young man's life when he raised the local stone are Peig Sayer's reminiscences, found in her autobiography Peig, of her childhood in the West of Ireland in the 1880s.

Focused on her brother Seán, Peig claimed that there 'was no limit to his strength' and to illustrate this she recounted his achievement in not only lifting the local stone, but also in raising another stone on top of it during a trial of strength at the town crossroads. For his efforts, Seán earned the lifetime nickname of the 'Pounder', a name we're told, which carried significant weight amongst the locals and helped single Seán out as an extraordinary man.

In Dreen, Co. Derry, locals similarly spoke of the heavy stone and the youth capable of lifting it several decades after the fact. Speaking in 1838, Michael Kane's recollections were recorded in the *Parishes of Co. Londonderry X, 1833-35, 1838*

There stands in a farmer's yard in the downland of Dreen a round polished stone, jet black. This stone is something larger than a beef's bladder. It was procured in the Faughan river upwards of 80 years ago and remains in the same place where it now stands from that period to the present; and it has been since a practice with the male youth of that neighbourhood to meet as often as leisure permitted at O'Kane's house, where the stone stands, and compete their strength in lifting this stone over the shoulder, and very few have been found within the above period to rise it breast high. Many persons at seeing the stone might imagine themselves strong and active

enough to cast it some yards, but the substance is so inconceivably heavy that many haughty persons are obliged to shrink back in disgrace from their boasted pretence...

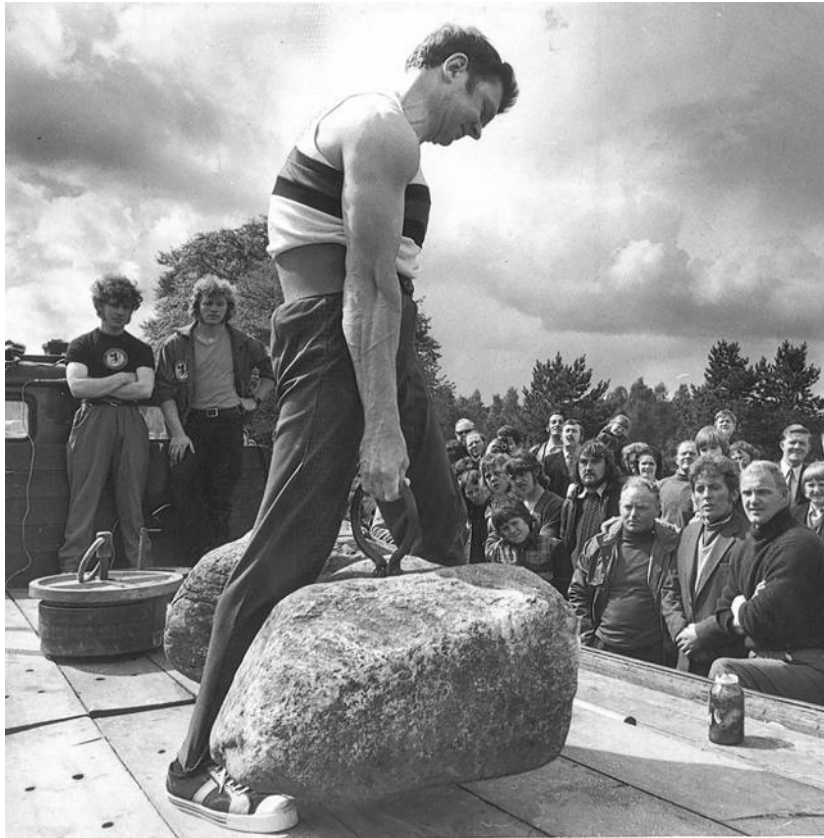
In much the same way that kicking points or scoring goals helped enhance one's status amongst his cohorts, stone lifting was one such means of proving one's masculinity within Ireland during this period. What marks stone lifting as a particularly interesting case study is that it was not formalised in the manner of wider codified sports. At a time when Gaelic games, soccer, rugby and to a lesser extent cricket had become increasingly organised, stone lifting remained a basic pursuit. Find the biggest, heaviest stone. Find the strongest men, and see who could lift it. Short, simple, but by no means sweet. Dispute the simplicity, but not ease, of lifting the stone, the pursuit was imbued with societal and gender importance for locals within the village.

Stone Lifting in Perspective

As a final point, it is worth examining Irish and Scottish stone lifting as a means of highlighting the cross-cultural similarities between these regions. While stone lifting exists in several regions such as Scandinavia, the Basque Region, and parts of Eastern Asia, few regions display commonalities past the necessity for raw strength.

In Ireland and Scotland however, similarities can be found. In both cases, Irish and Scottish lifters seem to raise the stone from the ground to chest height, as opposed for example to the Basque tradition of raising them to shoulder height. Furthermore in both regions, many individual villages had their own sanctified stones, often forged from the regions mythological past, which served as a litmus test for the men of the town. Such occasions were often to be found amongst the rural parts of the country, especially in heavily agrarian populations that were tinged with fishing as well.

Furthermore one can find similarities across the nomenclature. In Scotland the traditional phrase for a successful lift is the rather poetic statement of 'giving wind beneath the stone', 'putting wind beneath the stone' or some deviation of this. This highly specified phrase from Scotland nevertheless emerges in the writings of Liam O'Flaherty and even in the folklore collection, hinting it seems at a form of trans-Celtic strength community. This trans-Celtic community was later embodied by Jack Shanks, a Belfast born policeman who travelled to Scotland on several occasions in the 1970s to successfully lift the famed Scottish 'Dinnie Stones' weighing several hundred kilos.



Irishman Jack Shanks and the Dinnie Stones c. 1970s

Conclusion

Laden with mythology and masculinity, the highly specified practice of Irish stone lifting proves itself to be at once highly intriguing and highly frustrating for the sporting historian. The practice's history is at times ephemeral owing to the lack of available sources. The absence of great Irish stone men, known to the wider public, forces the historian down a rabbit hole of place names, eclectic autobiographies and stories told by schoolchildren. It is not, in any historical sense, ideal. In spite of such limitations, the existing sources, scant though they are, are nevertheless worthwhile. They tell of a pastime removed from other sporting practices. A pastime whereby men could prove themselves to others and become local heroes or even 'Pounders'.

This pastime spoke of an atavistic masculinity based on the ability to lift incredibly heavy things that no one else could. In these simple and raw tests, men battled with nature for the respect of their fellow townsmen. Though not as glamorous as a goal at Croke Park, these events were nevertheless part of the Irish sporting world.

Contacts

If anyone has more information relating to Stone Lifting in Ireland please use the contact details below.

conor.heffernan@ucdconnect.ie
www.physicalculturestudy.com

Australia

Freedom Stone (New South Wales)

Weight 195.4kg /429lb

Height 86cm

Side thickness 23cm

Front across the bottom 35cm

Front across the top 42cm



No discussion about the Freedom Stone should start without mentioning that it is special. It is possibly unique throughout the world and not for anything as trivial as its weight, size, dimensions or the strength required to lift-and-carry it.

The information below is what is publically available. Only those who lift the stone are allowed to know more. Very few men have been afforded that privilege.

The Stone was made by a Blue Mountains identity that tragically lost his daughter in a car crash. The stone was subsequently selected, then sized, to the young ladies birth date 1-91 (191kg).

It is intended to represent a very small fraction of the pain the family must have felt for the loss of their daughter.

The maker of the Freedom Stone lifted the stone before it was cut down from 250kg to 191kg. He is a true Stone lifter and seeks no validation online.

The Stone will always live in the Blue Mountains (NSW) but does not belong to anyone. International Strongman, Luke Reynolds, is the current guardian of the stone.

At first glance it is easy to assume this stone is just another strongman implement, dragged out now and then for the odd show and then tucked away again.

Closer inspection reveals much more. This is a stone carved by the hands of a father mourning the loss of a daughter. Every tooling mark is deliberate and lovingly guided to honour her.

The day of the contest was stirring indeed for the athletes so privileged to be invited to carry this stone. This day wasn't merely a contest honouring strength, though it did indeed do that. It was our chance to show the maker of this stone our appreciation for his efforts and empathy for his loss.

The athletes that day gave their all in front of the family to whom this stone represented so much. That is what this stone means and represents. That is what must be remembered each and every time a strongman engages this feat.

Luke Reynolds

It is a tragedy that such a stone has to exist. As far as we know it is unique within Australia, and possibly the world.

Should you ever be afforded the opportunity to carry the stone, please remember that you will then receive additional information about the origins of the stone and that this is not to be shared.

Bundanoon (New South Wales)

In the Southern Highlands of New South Wales lies the sleepy little town of Bundanoon. Once per year this country hamlet explodes and transforms into the fabled Brigadoon; Out of the mist from whence it came.

Upwards of 20,000 people descend upon the *Bundanoon is Brigadoon* Gathering, making this the largest Highland Gathering in the southern hemisphere.

The inaugural event was on 21st October 1978. It then quickly moved for its second outing to 28th April 1979, adopting the tag from then on of "Always in April".

The story of the Bundanoon Stones of Manhood, begins in the early 1990's when Australian Highland Games legend, strongman and Guinness world record holder, David Huxley was enlisted to perform at the Gathering.

In addition to various demonstrations of strength and Caber tossing, he introduced stone lifting demonstrations in 1993 along with Edwin Sergeant, a professional rower and stone lifter. The following year saw the addition of World's Strongest Man competitor and world Highland champ Joe Quigley to the lineup and the athletes demonstrated fine skills in throwing and lifting to an appreciative crowd

The stones used in the contest were a beautiful set of Sandstone McGlashen stones, made and quarried locally at the Bundanoon sandstone quarries. This set of stones became known as the Bundanoon Stones of Manhood.

Note: The McGlashen stones are named after the Scotsman who created the first ever set of round carved lifting stones. They were used in early strongman competitions. There were two sets made. One set remains in Markinch in Fife, Scotland. The name "Atlas Stones" is now more commonly used. Most likely due to marketing reasons and the global name recognition of Charles Atlas and also Atlas from Greek mythology.

The line up for 1995 included World's Strongest Man, Gary Taylor of Wales, South Africa's strongest Man, Wayne Price, Joe Quigley of Australia, David Huxley, Andy Andersson of Scotland and Colin Cox from New Zealand.

Other Strongman stars would come to Australia in those early years, many of whom would compete at Bundanoon. These included World's strongest man winners Magnus Ver Magnusson, Magnus Samuelsson, Svend Karlsen, Jamie Reeves and also World's strongest man competitors Mark Phillipi, Torfi Olafsson, Grant Edwards and Derek Boyer.

The format used at Bundanoon is of five McGlashens stones of ascending weight placed at five metre intervals. The stones are to be loaded onto barrels. The athlete who loads the most stones in the fastest time is declared the Brigadoon Champion.



Five times Brigadoon Champion, Craig Reid loads the 5th and final stone (165kg) in 2010.

Binks Stones (Victoria)

At the Amulet Highland Games in Beechworth two stones are carried for maximum distance. No time limit is imposed but no dropping or dragging is permitted.

It is an historic location for a stone walk as Donald Dinnie himself competed at Beechworth (1890) and one can only imagine what distance he would have recorded.

The two stones are of different sizes, heights and weights which contribute to the difficulty of challenge. The smaller stone is 102kg (224lb) and the larger is 151kg (332lb) when dry.

The Binks Stones are named after their original owner, Billy Binks, who trained with them in the 1970s and achieved a very commendable distance of 20' walking with them. Billy Binks also lifted the Dinnie Stones in Scotland unassisted.



At the time of writing the record is still held by Luke and it stands at 41' 1"/12.5m in 2014.

East Coast Stones (New South Wales)

The East Coast Heavy Events Championship is a long standing competition and often serves as a qualifier for the National Highland Games championships

At this event, a pair of stones is available to be walked for distance. They weigh 145kg/319lb and 125kg/275lb respectively and the objective is to walk them a maximum distance within 90 seconds.



Craig Reid, record holder, 30m in 90 seconds.

The stones themselves were the result of some molds splitting overnight during the curing process. In true Scottish style of 'Waste not. Want not', Craig, having successfully lifted the original Dinnie Stones in Scotland, realised the potential of a couple of misshapen stones and promptly put a handle on them. Thus the challenge was born.

The stones were first included in competition at the 2008 East Coast Highland games championships. They are the 10th event of the day after an exhausting 9 throwing events.

USA

Sir Keith Stone USA



The historic mansion house at Graeme Park, Horsham, Pennsylvania offers a unique cultural insight to life in colonial America. Perched on a pedestal close to a gable wall of the mansion house sits a curious mushroom shaped stone known as the “Lifting Stone” and some historical anecdotes make mention of this unique stone.

Near one corner of the house is the great “lifting-stone”, a mushroom shaped boulder with which Sir William is said to have always tested the strength of any applicant for work. If he could not lift it – and it was very heavy indeed – he was not engaged.

Portrait of a Colonial City, Philadelphia, 1670-1838. p. 134, Harold Donaldson Eberlein, Cortlandt Van Dyke Hubbard (1939).

Within this now deserted mansion Governor Keith entertained royally. In front of the house is Sir William’s “Lifting Stone”, a large mushroom shaped boulder which he used to test the strength of slaves before purchasing them.

Philadelphia, A Guide to the Nation’s Birthplace.
Pennsylvania Historical Commission , p. 661 (1937)

All around are ancient trees, many of them doubtless survivors from the primeval forest. Not far away is the great "lifting stone," a mushroom-shaped boulder with

which Sir William always tested the strength of an applicant for work. If he could not lift it - and it is of substantial weight - he was not employed

The Colonial Homes of Philadelphia and its Neighbourhood, Harold Donaldson Eberlein and Horace Mather Lippincott (1912)

Crowning a gatepost before the farmhouse of the present owner of the property, Morris B. Penrose, is the curious mushroom-shaped boulder used by Sir William as a test of the strength of applicants for work. Those who could not lift the stone could not hope for employment.

Old Roads Out of Philadelphia, p.267, John Tomson Faris, (1917)

And finally, one author simply refers to this mushroom shaped stone as a “Stone Strength Tester” A Guide Book of Art, Architecture, and Historic Interests in Pennsylvania. Anna Margareta Archambault , p.264 (1924).

Sir William Keith was born in 1669 at Boddam Castle, outside Peterhead in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. At this time, Scotland had yet to agree with a union with England although sharing the same Royal Head of state. Boddam Castle, more a tower-house than castle, was the home of the area Chieftain of Clan Keith with the head of the clan based at the imposing Dunnottar Castle, further south on the Aberdeenshire coastline near Stonehaven. Sir William was therefore part of the upper tier within his Clan hierarchy and had status.

It is more than likely that the language spoken in the area of Boddam within the time frame of Sir William was a local dialect of Scots and geographically, the area is considered as part of the lowlands. King James IV of Scotland (1473 – 1513) was the last Gaelic speaking King of Scotland as after his reign, the English language began to take hold in the southern areas of the Country and spread along the eastern coastal fringes. Sir William, educated in Aberdeen would have therefore spoken the language of the Scots however, the Clan system is a strong power base of culture and Gaelic practices were still retained.

Sir William’s father fought with the Earl of Marr at the Battle of Sheriffmuir in 1716, an important fact, as his side were “Jacobites” whose intention was to return the Royal line of Stuarts to the throne of Great Britain. The Stuart Standard was raised at Braemar in 1715 before which the Clans gathered in Glen Lui, where, as the men waited for all to arrive, a stone lifting competition took place and the stone used, known as *Clach Togalaich* (lifting stone) still exists. Near to the battle-site on Sherrifmuir, another lifting stone exists known as the *Wallace Putting Stone*.

The Jacobite rising of 1715 did not form any conclusion, there was no winner and Jacobite sympathies extended to 1746 with Bonnie Prince Charlie and the rout at Culloden Moor, the last battle fought on British soil. 1746 is a pivotal date in Scottish history as it marked the demise of the Scottish Clan system and was the death knell to Gaelic culture and Anglicisation soon began to take root.

Sir William Keith was a known Jacobite sympathiser and as such would have been despised by the power moguls in London (he was tried for Treason). His saving grace however was that he was educated and was part of the Scottish nobility which probably allowed him to still take part in the governance of the expanding British Empire. Underpinning his move to the colonies may well have been the notion that he could have been perceived as potential trouble and simply moved out of the way, quite considerably.

The historical texts relating to the lifting stone of Sir William Keith imply it as a test of strength for potential labourers to prove their strength ability and of course the unsavoury testing of slaves.

Stone lifting in Gaelic culture was functional in that it encouraged strength within the Clan system. It also had a fun element and it is known that, especially with competitions between men lifting stones, occasionally there was a substantial quantity of whisky consumed at the same time. The application of its culture is most decidedly serious but don't think for a minute that the actual application of strength did not involve some degree of merriment.

The stone is therefore unique in history. It is of American Stone and located on American soil but its culture is decidedly Scottish Gaelic. In this respect, on this side of the Atlantic, it would have been a "stone of strength" – "Clach-neart" (spoken Clack Neersht or Clack Ny –ert depending on dialect). Clach-neart Uilleam Ceiteach – the stone of strength of William Keith

Germany

Duke Christoph's black Stone

346 lbs

Although Peter was best known for Scottish Stones, his research extended in to Europe and beyond. Details of this German stone are easily found online. And he has an article on oldmanofthestones.com relating to this stone.



Miscellaneous

Editor: Peter had begun to produce some metadata around the stones and the terminology around them.

Stone	Traditional Usage
The Puterach at Balquhiddelr	Plinth
The Saddlin Mare of the Sma Glen	Plinth
The Wallace Putting Stone	Plinth
The Lifting Stones of Glenbuchat	Plinth
The Bodach a Chraigh Fianna, Glen Lyon	Plinth
The Putting Stone of the Clans, Barevan	Dyke Wall
The Lochaber Putting Stone	Dyke Wall
The Clach-neart Mheirichard	Dyke Wall
The Clachan-neart Achnack	Dyke Wall
The Inver Stone	Dyke Wall
The Clach Deuchainn of Skye	Plinth?

The Plaid worn by the Highlander was a multipurpose garment of value. It was more commonly used as a contrived form of sleeping bag if the Highlander had to spend the night under the stars and was also known to be used as a form of rope when twisted and on one occasion used for *abseiling*. Not surprisingly, the plaid was used for carrying and lifting and was applied to the stones.

Stone	
Glenelg Church Stone	Carried in the plaid used as a form of haversack
Clach Thogalaich, Colonsay	Carried in the plaid but unknown how.
Putting Stone of the Clans	Lifted by a woman using an apron as a harness
Achnangart Stone	Lifted and carried using the plaid as a makeshift harness.
The Murchison Stone	Lifted and carried to form part of a wall.
The Lealty Stone	A test of strength for Clan Munro