

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.

Rob Ritchie

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.