

THE DALWHINNIE STONE

“The situation of this Inn is solitary in the extreme, lying on the westerly 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 murmur of the stream” – The Scottish Tourist and Itinerary published 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.

The Dalwhinnie Stone

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 Corrieyarick 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 that on occasions there would be competition between them involving the lifting of stones. This is the more probable reason for the stone's 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.

So where would the best place be to keep the stone? Where it sits at present is the simple answer.

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.

As for the standard of the Inn? Queen Victoria and her Prince Consort, during their `Third Great Expedition 'incognito', passed the night of 8 Oct 1861 at the Inn and as she quotes, “.. ***unfortunately there was hardly anything to eat and there was only tea and two miserable starved Highland chickens without any potatoes. No pudding and no fun***”. Devoid of a calorie intake, I think it would be fair to state that good Queen Vic did not give the Dalwhinnie Stone a little try.

Now having accepted that the standard of the Inn (as expected) was not available of 5 star luxury the adornment of a smooth round stone at its frontage is unlikely to have been considered as a decoration. Its size and shape, so hard to find, makes it obviously a traditional stone of strength.

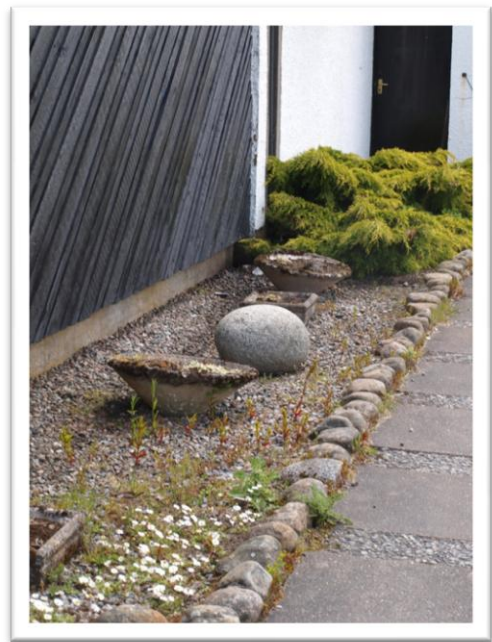
At the time of writing the current worldwide economic downturn may have serious consequences on the stone. The Hotel closed for business in November 2010 and it is unlikely to be reopened in the near future. The hotel is becoming dilapidated and there are serious concerns regarding the location of the stone. Perhaps finding an alternative location would be the best remedy however in doing so, the removal of its position may also be a removal of its history.

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

The bleak topography of the area does lend a certain charm to the lift. A true testament to the draw of this stone and the allure of stone lifting is well reflected in the account of James Grahame of Australia when he visited the stone in the winter of 2010 one of the worst in recorded history.

“My clearest memory is of standing in front of the Dalwhinnie stone in the dark with snow falling around me. The stone itself was illuminated only by the headlights of my car as my impatience had seen me leave Cumbernauld too early and arrive in Dalwhinnie before sunrise. I had no option but to attempt the stone immediately as a dusting of snowflakes were gathering upon it.

The stone is relatively smooth and egg shaped, which necessitated an open-handed lift to



the knees. I grabbed each end with a 'cupped' hand and rowed it to my knees and sank quickly in to a squat position. While it rested on my lap, I rotated it 90 degrees so it sat, pointing skyward, like a rugby ball waiting for the kick-off. The stone is not overly rotund and I wrapped my average length arms around it and interlaced my fingers for a tight grip. I positioned my arms slightly lower than halfway down the stone and drew it close to my chest with my biceps. Then I took an extra deep breath to increase my chest size and lock the stone in place. This was followed by a quick drive forward with the hips and I stood up and became a proud member of the Brotherhood of the Stones.”

James's lift of the Dalwhinnie Stone (in darkness and with his iconic saltire hat) can be viewed on You Tube - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgZd6gJjmyk>

Perhaps someday the factual history of the stone will be made known however its modern lifting history is considerable making this stone one that should be visited and attempted. The problem associated with the hotel is exacerbated by the fact that the construction headquarters for a new long distance power line is situated adjacent to the stone with an almost constant moving of heavy plant equipment. Serene and quiet is not the Dalwhinnie Stone but through time the location will revert back to how it should be.

Directions – *The stone is situated in the remote Highland village of Dalwhinnie but it is easy to find. From Perth follow the A9 north to Inverness. After 55 miles on a good road, Dalwhinnie is signposted and a slip road on the left is taken and followed straight into the centre of the village. The stone sits proudly outside the only hotel.*

Bibliography -

Leaves from the journal of Our Lives in the Highlands from 1848 to 1861 by HRH Queen Victoria published by Smith, Elder & Co, London 1868.

The Scottish Tourist and Itinerary published by Stirling, Kennedy & Co, Edinburgh 1830.

Special thank you to James Grahame from James Grahame of Melbourne, Australia for his written account of lifting the Dalwhinnie Stone.