

DONALD DINNIE DAY

THE GATHERING

FEATURING THE DONALD DINNIE GAMES

The Story So Far

In 1971 Belfast weightlifter Jack Shanks was shown a newspaper article in the Scottish Sunday post by a neighbour. The article contained a challenge by David Webster OBE and his friend Charlie Allen. The challenge was to lift two huge ringed granite boulders with a combined weight of 332kg. The boulders were named the Dinnie Stones after Scottish Highland games legend Donald Dinnie. Dinnie who is regarded as the World's first sporting superstar is reported to have lifted these boulders bare handed and on one occasion around 1860 is said to have carried them across the width of the bridge at Potarch in Royal Deeside, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, a distance of 17' 1.5". The challenge went unanswered for well over 100 years with all-comers failing and only a few able to lift them with the aid of hand straps.

At the time of reading the article Jack Shanks was the British record holder in the one hand deadlift and could manage 200kg (440lbs). Looking at the weights of the stones (188kg and 144kg) he became interested in taking on the challenge. Jack contacted David Webster and a few months later made his way to Potarch. On the 8th of May 1972, weighing just eleven and a half stone, he became the first man since Dinnie himself to lift the Dinnie Stones with his bare hands. Jack returned on the 3rd of June 1973 and secured his place in history by becoming the first man since Dinnie to carry the stones across the width of Potarch Bridge (17' 1.5") with bare hands showing the world that it was possible. This feat was not replicated again until August 2014 when strongman competitor Mark Felix successfully carried the stones the full distance at the Aboyne Highland Games.

Fast forward 42 years and Jack returned to Royal Deeside to watch his son Stevie lift the stones bare handed making them the first father and son in history to recreate the feat accomplished by Donald Dinnie and his father Robert Dinnie in the mid-1800s.

Following on from this a documentary on Scottish stone lifting was made by American fitness company Rogue and headed up by Drs Jan and Terry Todd. The documentary, entitled Stoneland, was filmed in August 2016. While filming at Potarch Stevie counted 7 previous Dinnie stone lifters including Jim Splaine, Dr Bill Crawford, Brett Nicol, Dr Jan Todd, Martin Jancsics and Jack & Stevie Shanks. David Webster who had started everything by rediscovering the Dinnie Stones in the early 1950s was also in attendance along with strength legend Dr Terry Todd who is sadly no longer with us. Stevie noticed how all the stone lifters, who knew of each other but had never actually met before, were swapping stories of their adventures with the Dinnie Stones. Traditionally lifters make a very solitary pilgrimage to Scotland to take on the stones and Stevie was taken by everyone's shared passion for something that had only been achieved by less than 50 people in almost 150 years at that time! There was a website in existence created by Dinnie Stone historian Gordon Dinnie. The website listed all successful lifts of the stones since Jack Shanks in 1972. It was such a fantastic day that Stevie thought it would be a great idea to invite all the previous Dinnie Stone lifters to attend an event at Potarch where they could all meet up and share their experiences at the place where it all happened.

Stevie spent the next few months contacting all the previous lifters and on Sunday 6th August 2017 the dream became a reality with over 35 previous (and new) lifters young and old attending the first Dinnie Stone Gathering at Potarch. It was a very historic day with a number of successful lifts of the Dinnie Stones and two successful attempts by Belfast lifter Brian Irwin and current Dinnie Stones timed hold Guinness World Record holder Mark Haydock to carry the stones across Potarch Bridge bringing the total to 4. Everyone agreed that this was a significant day in Dinnie Stone history.

David Webster OBE at an amazing 93 years of age is still a very prominent figure in strength culture around the world and in addition to writing many books on the subject he has been heavily involved in the early days of the World's Strongest Man contest, the Arnolds, the Commonwealth Games and many highland games events worldwide. One of David's dreams as a Dinnie enthusiast and historian was to have a Donald Dinnie Day celebration. Stevie Shanks spoke to David about the success of the Dinnie Stones Gathering and they decided in conjunction with the Dinnie Stones Committee at Ballogie Estate that it would be great to carry on the success and create an annual Donald Dinnie Day event which would be held at Potarch on the first Sunday of August each year following the Aboyne Highland Games which are held on the first Saturday. David very kindly agreed to take on the role of Event Chieftain.

The second event was also a great success and created more history with the first lift by a lady (Scottish born Australian Leigh Holland-Keen) since Dr Jan Todd in 1979!

The continued success of the event and growing popularity of stone lifting worldwide lead to the addition of the Donald Dinnie Games at the third Gathering in August 2019. The Games were developed by Stevie Shanks and Brett Nicol and were added to pay tribute to Donald Dinnie's athletic achievements all over the world. All the events feature natural stone lifting challenges which recreate the ancient rites of passage of stone lifting some of which are covered in the Stoneland Documentary which to date has had over 21 million views! All the stones used were sourced locally by Brett Nicol and the Nicol walking Stones challenge has since been used at a number of Giants Live events and Stuart Murray's Scotland's Strongest man!

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 it was impossible to run Donald Dinnie Day, The Gathering IV, so a virtual event was organised. The popularity of this event was huge with literally hundreds of lifters young and old posting their lifts on-line from all over the world to celebrate a shared love of stone lifting.

With the Covid-19 pandemic still affecting global travel and athletic events, Donald Dinnie Day, The Gathering V in 2021 had to be held in private at the stunning Lodge on the Loch in Aboyne. The event was a huge success despite the restrictions with notable performances from Laurence Shahlaei setting a new Guinness World Record continuous walk record with the Dinnie Stones and Andy Black narrowly missing a new Guinness World Record on the Nicol Walking Stones.

Special thanks must go to the Donald Dinnie Day committee and the Donald Dinnie Games events team, without whom none of this would be possible.

The Donald Dinnie Day Committee are: David Webster OBE, Jack Shanks, Brett Nicol, Jim Splaine, Rosemary Splaine, Martin Jancsics, James Grahame, Malcolm Nicol, Lydia Nicol, Christina Nicol, Helen Knowles, Simon Truesdale & Stevie Shanks.

The Donald Dinnie Games Events Team are: Brett Nicol, Mark Sheriffs, Mark Haydock, Jim Splaine, Rosemary Splaine, Steve Gardner, Martin Jancsics, Jamie Duncan, John Gibb, James Grahame, Graham Mustard & Stevie Shanks.

Congratulations to our 3 worthy winners of the Donald Dinnie Games whose names are now etched on the magnificent Webster Dinnie Stones Trophy created and presented by event chieftain David Webster and his family:

2019 Champion – Jamie Gorrian

2020 Champion – Jamie Duncan

2021 Champion – Conor Curran

More information on the Dinnie Stones and The Gathering can be found at:

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