

DONALD DINNIE FAMOUS STRONG MAN

Potarch Bridge over the Dee was built in 1813 by tough, hardy masons, and it would be a mason called Robert Dinnie, and his famous son, Donald, who would lift two massive granite boulders used as anchors for the bridge's scaffolding and christen them The Dinnie Stones. Lifting the stones, which weigh 22.75 and 30 stone respectively, is now a worldwide challenge to strongmen and women. Donald held the record for lifting both stones with ease — and carrying them the width of the bridge, a distance of approximately 17 feet — for over a hundred years.

Donald Dinnie and his father came from a long line of barrel-chested, lofty stonemasons who originated in Deeside. Donald was born in 1837 at Balnacraig, near Aboyne, the third of ten children. By this time, his father had a very successful building trade and had been known for his sporting exploits. Robert had brain as well as brawn, but a long-standing feud between him and the local schoolmaster meant that he gave up any notion of following an academic life.



The Dinnie Stones at Potarch Bridge

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Even by the age of ten, Donald's sporting prowess began to shine; he would race the Deeside coach between Potarch and Kincardine O'Neil, a distance of two miles, and could keep up with it the whole way! Five years later, on leaving school, Donald won a wrestling prize, which marked the start of his career in athletics, from which he profited financially and developed a reputation for strength and agility. By 1867, Donald settled on making athletics his main career. In that year he won nine first place medals at the very first Aboyne Highland Games. No shrinking violet, Donald had been describing himself as the Scottish Heavyweight Champion since 1856, yet not without good reason! His records included throwing the heavy hammer 81ft 6in, throwing the heavy stone 35ft 5 in, throwing the light stone 45ft 7in, and clearing just over 5ft in the high jump.

Donald was a huge man, just clear of 6ft in height, 15st in weight, chest of 48in and biceps of 15in. He was the archetypal strongman, which appealed to the Americans, as he was invited to tour various Caledonian Clubs from 1870, beginning in New York. Dinnie could command crowds of 25,000, and by the end of the decade could earn \$700 a day!

He toured the world, defeating wrestling champions in New Zealand and South Africa. Married twice, Donald kept on competing well into his seventies. He prevailed on the Aboyne Highland Games committee to institute special events for 'veterans' like himself (i.e. over sixty!). Four years before his death at his home in Kensington, Donald competed in London at a health and strength show. He was 75 years old when he died, and it was 1972 before his record of carrying the Dinnie Stones was broken by Jack Shanks of Belfast, who weighed a 'mere' 11 stone.

The nearby Potarch Hotel is a beautiful venue from which to visit the Stones, as they sit by the bridge, waiting for their annual challengers.