The Story Behind the Peak District Dinnie Stones

By Kelly Wood

Two giant stones. 352kg of unforgiving weight. One legendary challenge.

Tucked away at Matlock Farm Park is a pair of stones that have developed a reputation far beyond the Peak District. Known as the **Peak District Dinnie Stones**, they have become one of the most anticipated features of the annual Peak District Highland Games – and for anyone brave enough to attempt them, simply getting them off the ground is an achievement in itself.

But their story begins with one of the most famous strength challenges in sporting history.



Figure 1. The Peak District Dinnie Stones.

Inspired by a legend

The original Dinnie Stones are two enormous granite boulders at Potarch in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. Their history dates back to the 1830s, when iron rings were

attached to the stones so they could be used as counterweights for scaffolding during maintenance work on Potarch Bridge.

They were later made famous by Scottish strongman **Donald Dinnie**, one of the great sporting figures of the Victorian era. In 1860, Dinnie famously lifted the two stones and carried them across the width of Potarch Bridge, a distance of around 17 feet, using his bare hands. Together, the original stones weigh around **332.5kg**, with the larger stone weighing approximately 188kg and the smaller around 144.5kg.

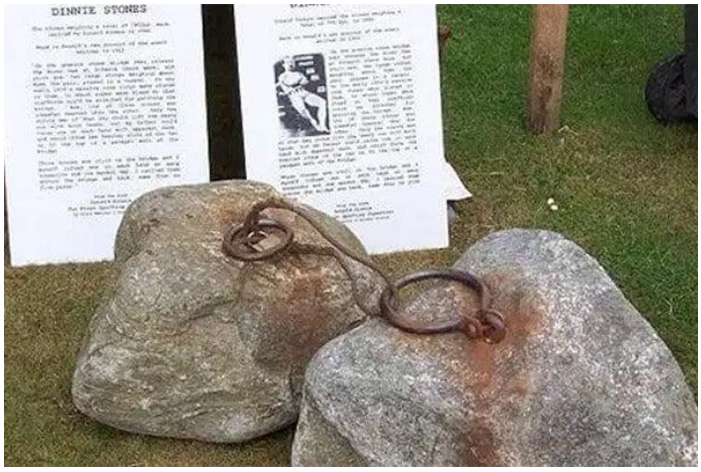


Figure 2. The original Dinnie Stones.

The feat became part of Dinnie's extraordinary legacy and helped establish the stones as one of the world's most iconic tests of strength.

More than a century later, the challenge continues to attract strongmen and women from around the world. The original stones remain at Potarch, where lifting them is still considered a serious test of grip and raw strength.



Figure 3. Jacks Shanks lifting the original Dinnie Stones in 1972.



Figure 4. A modern lift of the original Dinnie Stones.

A challenge of our own

Following the successful introduction of the **Peak District Highland Games** at Matlock Farm Park, the event organisers began looking for something truly brutal to bring the competition to a dramatic finale. The idea of a Dinnie Stone challenge was born.

Then came an extraordinary discovery. On the grounds of Matlock Farm Park, two giant stones were found – one larger than the other, with the second stone possessing a particularly awkward shape. Their uneven dimensions created exactly the sort of brutal, unpredictable weight distribution that makes a Dinnie Stone challenge so notoriously difficult.

Replica rings were added, transforming the two giant stones into what became known as the **Peak District Dinnie Stones**, in tribute to the original stones. And there was one important difference between these and their famous Scottish inspiration. They were heavier!

The Peak District pair weigh a combined **352kg**, with the smaller stone weighing **163kg** and the larger a staggering **189kg**. That makes them around 20kg heavier overall than the original Dinnie Stones.



Figure 5. Peak District Dinnie Stones on their platform.

The ultimate Peak District Highland Games finale

Since their introduction, the Peak District Dinnie Stones have become the grand finale of the Peak District Highland Games.

For the competitors, this isn't simply a matter of picking up two weights. The stones are uneven, awkward and unforgiving, demanding enormous grip strength, balance, technique and sheer determination.

Strongmen and strongwomen face the challenge of lifting both stones and, in some attempts, walking with them. Wrist straps are permitted for the challenge, but that doesn't make the task any less formidable. In fact, watching the stones slowly leave the ground can be one of the most tense moments of the entire Peak District Highland Games.



Figure 6. Peak District Dinnie Stones used in the final of the Matlock Farm Highland Games.

Breaking barriers

The Peak District Dinnie Stones have also played their part in showcasing the incredible strength of female athletes.

In **2021, Chloe Brennan became the first woman to lift the Peak District Dinnie Stones**, creating a landmark moment in the history of the challenge. Her achievement was even more remarkable given the sheer size of the stones – the larger stone alone weighed around three times her 10-stone body weight!

Her lift demonstrated exactly why the Dinnie Stones are about more than brute strength. They demand technique, determination and the ability to summon an extraordinary amount of power at precisely the right moment.

The achievement also formed part of a wider movement towards greater diversity in strength sports, with women increasingly taking on the same demanding events as their male counterparts. The introduction of strongwomen to the Peak District Highland Games in 2021 was widely celebrated, with Brennan's Dinnie Stone lift becoming one of the standout moments.



Figure 7. Chloe Brennan became the first woman to lift the Peak District Dinnie Stones

From Local challenge to strength pilgrimage

What started as an idea for the Peak District Highland Games has gradually taken on a life of its own. Word of the Peak District Dinnie Stones has spread through the strength community, attracting strongmen and strongwomen from much further afield who want to test themselves against the infamous pair.

For some, the stones have become a destination in their own right, a stop on the journey towards the ultimate pilgrimage to Aberdeen and the original Dinnie Stones. And there is good reason for their reputation. Just getting both Peak District Dinnie Stones off the ground is no mean feat.

Those who manage it earn their place in the **Peak District Dinnie Stones Hall of Fame**, alongside the growing list of athletes who have taken on the challenge. Their achievements are also recorded on the Peak District Dinnie Stones Instagram page, creating a permanent record of those who have successfully conquered the stones.

A legacy that continues

There is something fitting about the Dinnie Stones finding a home at a Highland Games in the Peak District.

The original stones were made famous by a legendary strongman and athlete more than 160 years ago. Today, their Peak District counterparts continue that tradition, giving a new generation of strongmen and strongwomen their own opportunity to test themselves against two enormous pieces of stone. They may not stand on Potarch Bridge, but the Peak District Dinnie Stones have created a legend of their own.

352kg. Two stones. One brutal challenge.

And every year at the Peak District Highland Games, the question remains the same…

Who can lift them?