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Introduction

Continuing our theme of natural stone lifting, it felt logical to document the only two sets of natural stones available in Australia for competition lifting. These are located at the *Maryborough Highland Gathering* and the *Amulet Highland Games* competitions. Both are in Victoria

For those readers who missed the original article on natural stones, it can be found here

<http://www.australianheavyevents.com/blog/natural-stone-lifting-how-to>

Maryborough Stones

Maryborough Highland Games is the second oldest continuously running

Gathering in the world (Second only to Braemar in Scotland).

It has a long and distinguished history of Heavy Events and Heavy Events athletes. Joe Quigley (Commonwealth Games athlete) , Scott Martin (2x Olympian and Commonwealth Games athlete) and Aaron Neighbour (IHGF World Champion 2009) to name a few

The *History of the Maryborough Highland Society - Bagpipes, Bowlers and Cabers* notes the introduction of 'a new athletic games event, the stone relay' in 1997. At which time they claimed a world record performance when Bill Lyndon (Multi World Strongest Man competitor) lifted the stones in 14.03 seconds.

It proved to be a popular and enduring event and was very well received by the crowd.

The stones were placed directly in front of the grandstand and the athletes could be guaranteed the full attention of the crowd as it was the last event on the ground prior to the massed pipe bands.

The Australian crowd would then shout both encouragement and withering insults with equal gusto. I am assured that Australians insult the athletes they like and are merely polite to those they have little time or affection for.







Aaron Neighbour, IHGF World Champion 2009 completing the Maryborough Stones in 2009

However, these atlas stones did not belong to the Maryborough Highland Society and were typically transported from surrounding areas by Victorian strongmen for use on the day. Therefore there was no guarantee that the stone lifting would take place until shortly before the Gathering.

To ensure the regular appearance of this popular event, a trip was undertaken on the 22/11/2014 to find some natural stones that could be permanently stored at Maryborough. Legendary Heavy, Billy Binks, drove to the appropriately named Rockbank suburb of Victoria to search for appropriate stones.

He has a friend who owns a farm in the area and we had permission to scour his land. Although there were rocks everywhere, it still took about 4 hours to find, weigh and select 6 suitable stones.

Each stone was weighed by wrapping a cargo net around it. This was then attached to an orange Crane scale, which in turn, was suspended from an Axle. The axle was shouldered by myself and Billy.

Unfortunately, Billy is about 6" taller than me and when we both stood up the whole stone/net/scale apparatus would slide quickly towards my face and groin. Billy never got tired of this amusement and it may be the most he has laughed since the 1970s.





In the end the selected stones weighed in at 95kg, 109kg, 125kg, 140kg and 155kg. A 'spare' stone was also taken which weighed 111kg.





Their first outing was on the 1st January 2015 at the annual gathering in Maryborough. As luck would have it, the 95kg stone split in half during the warmups. Of course, we had not brought the spare stone and had to accept that the first stone would weigh about 45kg during the competition.

No one on the day succeeded in lifting the 155kg stone. We look forward to the coming years and hope that someone will lift it soon.

Maryborough Highland Games takes place on 1st January every year and the the stones are waiting for you.

Amulet Highland Games

The Amulet Highland Games takes place at Amulet Winery in Beechworth, Victoria. It is a relatively recent but immensely popular addition to the Highland Games circuit in Victoria.

It is a wonderful event for those athletes who enjoy stone lifting. There is often a two-handed stone put as well as a Dinnie-Style stone walk (covered in forthcoming article) and the natural stones described below.

Ben Clifton is the main organiser of the competition and a man about whom several interesting articles could be written. Last time we met, he traumatised us with his 'snake story'. Essentially, he found a venomous snake near his property. Fearing for the safety of his customers he decided to relocate it. Unfortunately, as he stepped out his Ute, the snake attempted to bite him.

Never one to shirk from a challenge, Ben put his shotgun back in his ute and got his shovel instead as he wanted a 'fair fight'!

In 2013, a phone call between Ben and fellow-organiser athlete Craig Reid took place. They agreed that a set of natural stones would be an excellent addition to the competition. Unfortunately, Ben and Craig live 750km/460ml apart and Ben had no prior experience in lifting or selecting stones for a competition.

Shortly after the phone call, Ben left his house, armed only with his tractor and a vague description of what constitutes 'good lifting stones'. Due to the distances involved, no one else would see the stones until they arrived the day before the competition.

We should not have worried as Ben selected and weighed a great set of natural stones from around his property.

"Our first look at the stones was at the winery the day before the 2013 contest.

We arrived in the afternoon and went about inspecting the equipment for the next day. Along with new stones, there were also brand new cabers to be examined. The weather that day was uncharacteristically fine and clear, giving us all a false sense of confidence for the following day. The stones themselves looked large, sharp and imposing. Completely different to any stones we had encountered before, natural or atlas. These were untested and after four years of atlas stones at Amulet, they were a welcome local addition, that somehow suited the surrounds so much more. At Craig Reid's advising, Ben had left the stones completely untouched. No filing, Sanding, Chipping or cleaning was to take place. In fact several clumps of lichen call the stones home. The square edges of Southern Highlander granite give the illusion of nice hand holds. This is not so. The edges are like razor blades to the skin, randomly assorted pieces of quartz provide natural slipping points and completely different weight distribution from stone to stone presents a worthy challenge to a stonelifter from the outset". - Luke Reynolds

In the first article we discussed the kind of variation to be found in natural stones. This set does not disappoint. Completely unique, they are a most worthy challenge. The contest calls for all 5 to be loaded onto barrels spaced 5 metres apart on the edge of a grassy hill. Individual stone weights are 96kg, 111kg, 116kg, 147kg and 174kg.

To date, they have been used only twice under competition conditions, 2013 and 2014.

As is customary for weather in the Victorian highlands, it was unforgiving on both occasions. Cold and wet is not a nice combination when talking about gripping razor sharp edges.

In the 2013 contest, five accomplished stone lifters were invited to compete. Two athletes managed to lift four out of five stones, Scott Martin and Luke Reynolds, with Luke completing it in the fastest time. The remaining three athletes managing to lift three stones, James Grahame, Tim O'Shea and Jordan Steffens. The 5th stone this time around remained grounded, despite Luke getting some air underneath.

Below is Luke Reynolds' Stone run from 2013.

Below: Olympian, Commonwealth medalist and Highland games champion
Scott Martin on the stones

If 2013 was cold and horrible; 2014 was even worse. The same 5 athletes
from the different corners of the country gathered for the rematch. This time in

very wet conditions, Scott would be triumphant with a very solid four stones. The remaining four athletes would leave Blood, Skin and frustration on the first three stones.

So to this point in history, the 174kg monster 5th stone remains undefeated.

Other Natural Stones in Competition

There have been a small number of times where natural stones have been used elsewhere around Australia in recent history in strongman competitions.

In early 2008, a set of natural stones were used in the Australia's Strongest Man competition in Lismore, NSW. Sourced locally in the northern rivers region, these stones were used in both the amateur and pro divisions of the contest. Large dirty yellow coloured monsters, they presented a new challenge to athletes generally expecting atlas stones from such a contest.

Luke Reynolds triumphed on this set in the amateur contest despite not loading all 5 stones. Derek Boyer triumphing in the pro division.

Another set of natural stones were used in the Northern Australia's Strongest man contest, held in late 2008 in Kalbar, South East Queensland. These stones again were sourced locally in the SE Queensland region. Large and rough hewn, these stones were impressive looking from the start.

Alas after the first two competitors completed their run, two of the stones had fractured after being dropped due to natural fault lines within their structure. The contest became who could load 3 fastest and unfortunately this was the last time these stones were to be used.

Natural stones are a great competition event. They are unpredictable in a way that atlas stones are not. No two runs are the same and both the athletes and the crowd know it; and love it. Hopefully these two articles will encourage some athletes and lifters towards including local natural field and river stones in their competitions.

Next Monday, the article published will be on walking with ringed stones. Also known as the Dinnie-style walk.



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