

To Lift A Heavy Stone

“Ultimately, a man is challenged and bettered by facing any task that exceeds his current abilities. Some chose big stones. Others drive past or traverse such challenges...pity.”

Steve Jeck, Author: “Of Stones and Strength”

To lift a heavy stone is to reach back into history. To lift a heavy stone is to stand with men of might and muscle. To lift a heavy stone is to become a man. For centuries, tribes and communities would test themselves against nature by uprooting and lifting heavy, awkward stones. They saw this as a way to prove themselves as men. To take on the most ferocious being known: Mother Nature. Nature formed these stones. Nature placed these stones. And, these stones lay in wait, daring the toughest to step up and try their might. Is there anything better?

I began lifting stones in 2000 as a way to get stronger. I had lifted barbells and dumbbells for 10 years, and I was ready for something different. I soon discovered that slinging around heavy weights on a bar has no direct correlation to hoisting a heavy stone. In 2000, I deadlifted 560 and squatted 500 in a raw meet. That same year, I got my ass handed to me by a 300-pound barn stone. I could not get it more than a few inches off the ground. I knew right then and there that stone lifting was for me.

If you have never tackled a heavy stone, let me tell you it is the hardest thing you will ever attempt to lift. It will tax your entire body from your calves to your traps. If the chain has a weak link-you will fail. A barbell is balanced. It is designed to be lifted. A stone is awkward. It may be heavier on one side than the other. It may be smooth or rough. It may have ledges for your hands, or it may not. Each and every stone is different. Unlike the shiny barbell, a stone is not designed to be lifted.

Types of Lifting Stones

People who watch World’s Strongest Man are familiar with 2 types of stones that are used. The first is the Atlas Stone. The Atlas Stone is any stone that is nearly perfectly round in shape, usually fairly smooth, and extremely hard to pick up. In contests, these stones are lined up 6-10 in a row from lightest to heaviest, and placed on platforms of varying heights. Many times, a substance called “tacky” is used on the stone to aid in the gripping of the stone. Tacky is substance made mostly of pine tar that, when placed on the hands, arms, and chest, allows the stone to stick to the skin making it easier to grip.

Atlas stones can be homemade or purchased. If you are on a budget, the easiest way to get a set off atlas stones of varying weight is to build them yourself. I have built many

stones without any problems by using these directions:

<http://www.133.pair.com/ian/vault/house/stones/stonemaking.html>



Two homemade Atlas Stones. The right one weighs in at 260 pounds and the left one weighs approximately 290 pounds.

If you don't mind spending a little more money, you can't go wrong with the Slater Stone Molds. These molds will make ball after ball. The balls that come out of these molds are solid, extremely smooth, and of excellent quality. Get the molds here:

<http://www.bodydemand.com/slaters/products.htm>



A 360-pound smooth ball that came out of a 21" mold.

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If money is not a problem for you, then I highly recommend what is considered the Gold Standard in Atlas Stones: Solid Granite Atomic Balls. These stones are indestructible. Granite will last forever, and if you drop them on your concrete floor-they will just break your floor! These balls come in smooth or rough cuts. Find the Atomic Balls here: <http://www.atomicathletic.com/store/category.aspx?categoryid=209&startpage=1>

The second type of stone often used in World's Strongest Man is the Husafell Stone. This stone is often times not even made of granite or rock, but rather of steel. The Husafell Stone is often shaped like a shield and is anywhere from 300 to over 400 pounds in weight. The lifter usually gets the stone off a waist high platform, high chests it, then walks it for distance.



A 300+ pound Husafell Stone courtesy of my good friend James "Shrug" Smith from Kittanning, PA. James has Husafell Stones that weigh in excess of 400-pounds!

Nature's Weights

For me, my favorite type of stone to lift is the stone you dig up in nature. These can be found anywhere; in the woods, river, along the side of the road, or on near a walking path. These stones are fun because you never know how much they will weigh, or how awkward they will be. You have to step up and get crazy, or it may just remained glued to the earth. These stones also hold special meaning because I often wonder how many before me, if any, have lifted the very stones I have lifted.

Every once in awhile, I come across a stone in nature that is just too nice. I don't like to keep too many of these stones because I want the men who come after to me to have a chance at lifting them as I did. However, when they are too nice to pass-up, I will usually

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load them into my truck, and take them back to my house. Here are a few that I really love.



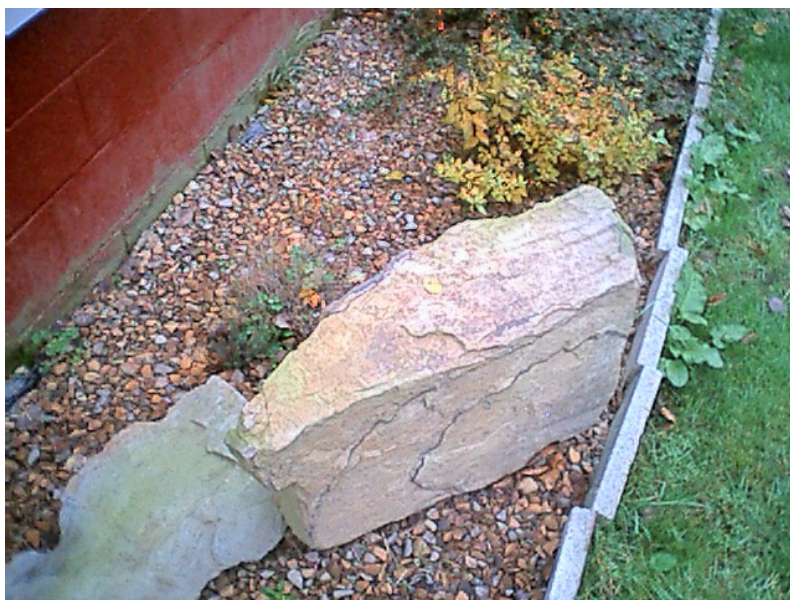
This stone weighs in at around 250+ pounds. The strange shape makes it extremely awkward to lift. It wants to dump forward on you as you try and lap it. Once lapping it, it spins on you as you chest it. Just a damn fun stone to mess around with!

I got this stone off the side of the road I live on. I was driving by and noticed it, so I quickly pulled off the side of the road and uncovered it. It was quite hard to get it from the ditch it was in, across the road, and into the bed of my truck. I am glad I did. I use this stone at least once a week. Diesel Crew's very own Jedd Johnson once had this stone high enough to see underneath it! Anyone familiar with Jedd's overhead strength knows that this stone is the real deal for Jedd not to lock it out!



The angle of this picture is poor. These two stones are actually quite wide. The one on the left is about 200 pounds and is a great little Husafell type stone, fun to carry and fun to try and get overhead. I dug this stone up next to the river that runs North of my father-in-laws property. When I saw it, I knew before I even lifted it that I had to have it. This stone helped me prepare for my first strongman contest last November.

The one on the right is about 100-pounds and was originally brought home for my youngest stepson to use. I like to use it for stone snatches and overhead presses for high reps. I got this stone off the side of the road. During the winter a snowplow had come through and broke it loose. Fun little stone.



This stone is a monster and this picture does it no justice. It weighs in at an easy 400-pounds of pure ass-kicking sand stone. I have yet to pick this stone up like a Husafell Stone, so that should tell you just how heavy it is. As a matter of fact, NO ONE has hoisted this stone like a Husafell Stone!

The way it is laying in the picture is normally how I pick it up. I deadlift it, grasping it with one hand low and the other high. Once deadlifted, I make an attempt to roll it onto my lap. I have not yet been successful. Just to key you in on how hard this stone is, and how awkward, Jedd Johnson and Jim "Smitty" Smith both tried to lift this monster deadlift style and failed!

This stone was found in a ditch on a backcountry road. It is a good thing I found it there! My oldest stepson and I each took an end and tried to carry it across the road. He dropped his end so consequently I dropped mine! There is sat in the middle of the road! Luckily we got it into the truck.

Lifting the Stone

When someone is interested in lifting stones, they will often ask me what types of gym lifts will make them a better stone lifter. My honest opinion is this: **No gym lifts will make you a better stone lifter!** Sure, many people swear by squats, deadlifts, power cleans, rows, zercher lifts, curls, etc, etc. I agree that those are all great movements, and all of those movements should be part of a well-rounded weight-training program for strength. However, I am a firm believer that the only way to get good at stone lifting is to lift stones. Lots of great squatters and deadlifters cannot lift heavy stones. The movements are just too different.

Stone lifting takes strengths that aren't often built in the gym. It takes a tremendous chest crush to hold the stone tight and to get it off the ground and into the lap. It takes round back strength to get the stone moving and to stand up with the stone. It takes leg, hip, trap, glute, lat, shoulder, and biceps strength to move the stone and to shoulder the stone. I have yet to find a single gym movement that trains all of those muscles equal to what a stone does. Hell, heavy stone lifting taxes my abdominals!

Technique

You will have to experiment with technique and see what you like. Myself, I like to straddle the stone with a nice wide stance, making sure that the stone is between my legs and under me, not in front of me. Others, like Jedd, like to have the stone out in front of him.

I start the lift by bending over and cupping my arms around and under the stone. The stronger your chest crush is, the more you can go around the stone. The stronger the biceps are, the more you go under the stone. I am still nursing a pec that I tore in

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December of 2003, so I go under the stone more then around it. However, the more I train with the stones, the more I can grasp around the stone instead of under it.



This is an example of grasping around the stone. This type of start favors a strong chest crush.



Here is an example of grasping underneath the stone to start it. This type of start favors strong biceps.

Once you figure out how you want to start the stone, grasp it hard, and begin pulling it up your body. This movement cannot be done without the hunching of the lower back. Lower back health and bowed back strength are very important and vital to successful, injury free stone lifting!



Here the stone is brought to the lap.

Once the stone is in your lap, you will be in position to either high chest it to a barrel or shoulder it. Many people look different with the stone lapped. I prefer to be in a deep squat stance, with a semi-wide base, and the stone sitting in my lap.



As you can see, I squat deep with the stone in my lap.

Jedd Johnson is a taller lifter, and he prefers to have the stone high on his lap. His form takes the hips and legs out of the movement and utilizes his stronger lower back. If you look at this video: http://www.dieselcrew.com/videos/maryland%20stones_0001.wmv you will see what I am talking about. This form favors Jedd's height. If he sunk as low as I do with the stone, he would have to lift it so much further to get it onto the barrel.

Once I have the stone in my lap, like above, I transfer my hands to the top of the stone.



Here you can see that I have switched my hands from underneath the stone, to the top of the stone. This is in preparation for the stand up. This also illustrates just how low I go with the stone.

I call the above-pictured stance my “launch position”. This is because my next movement will be a huge thrust of my hips forward and upwards, while simultaneously driving my feet into the ground and apart. All the while, I maintain a tight squeeze on the ball, forcing it into my chest with my hands and arms. I am a natural squatter and deadlifter, so this takes advantage of my stronger hips, glutes, hams, and quads.



As you can see, the ball’s position on my body has not changed much. It looks the same as it did when I had it in my lap. However, you can see from the picture that my hips are shooting forward while my feet are “spreading the floor”. The separation of the mats shows this.



Here is another angle of my hip and leg drive while the ball stays positioned on my chest.

This would be the point that you would set the stone atop a barrel.

If I am going to shoulder the ball, I use the exact same form. When the ball gets chest high, I keep exploding upwards while simultaneously switching my left arm underneath to carry the ball to my shoulder.



The left arm goes under the stone while the right stays on top to carry it upwards to my shoulder.

Odds and Ends

If you are going to make stone lifting a weekly thing, there are a few things I recommend you purchase. First is a good pair of shoes. I find that I am the most comfortable in a pair of Adidas weightlifting shoes. Yes, they are damn expensive, but well worth it. It is a shoe that won't wear out too fast, and it can be used for many other lifts. The slight heel allows me to squat deep with the stone in my lap and the hard sole allows to push against the floor. I am sure a good solid heeled work boot would also do the trick.

The second thing I recommend is some sleeves for your forearms. Sure, you can lift stones without them. However, you will soon grow tired of raw, scraped forearms week after week. Also, if you are like me and have tattoos on your forearms, this will keep the stonework from destroying that expensive ink! I don't use anything fancy-just a set of ACE elbow sleeves pulled up about 2 inches from my wrists.

As you can see from the photos, I do not use a belt or tacky. The belt does not allow me to get low enough on the stone and just puts me in a worse position lower back wise. It will be up to you on whether you wear one or not. I don't use tacky because it is a pain in the ass to apply and remove. It is also quite expensive and when lifting stones two times a week, I would have to mortgage my house to get the stuff! I do not consider tacky cheating, and I use it in contests. The way I see it, if I don't use it in training, I will be that much stronger with it in a contest. If you want some, visit this link:

<http://www.theweakgeteaten.com/Products/accessories/tacky.htm>

Above and Beyond

I hope I have opened your eyes to the art of stone lifting. It truly is a total body blaster, and it will take your strengths to a whole new level! Start slow, work your way up, and soon you will be lifting 300+ pound atlas stones like it's your job! Any question, please feel free to email me at raw222@adelphia.net.

Respect history, respect nature, and respect yourself.

LIVE STRONG!

Rick Walker, CSCS

This article is in memory of my friend and fellow stone lifter Eric Townsend who left us too soon. We will lift the heavy stones in heaven brother!

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"It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by the dust and sweat and blood and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat."

THEODORE ROOSEVELT