The Lifting Stone at the Youth Center Draws Young Men for Strength Tests

The nearly egg-shaped, smooth stone weighs 117 kg. Its circumference along the length is 142 cm and across the width 127 cm. Likely shaped entirely by nature (a product of the Ice Age?), the stone is remarkable in its symmetrical form.

As for the stone's "recent history," we know that it has served both as a measure of men’s strength and arm girth, and that it lay at the Nysto farm before being moved in the 1930s to the yard of the youth center.

Edvard Beijar (Nysto Edvard, b. 1900) recounts that both youth and older folks often gathered for lifting contests at his home farm. Edvin Back (1908–1986) offers this brief reflection on the early days of sports in Karperö:

“The methods with which young people tested their strength were probably among the most primitive, such as arm wrestling, throwing cart wheels over the head, pulling a rolling pin or a smooth stick, or lifting stones like the one that lay in the yard at Nysto. Many a young man likely strained his back on that stone in his eagerness to show off his strength.”

Lifting the stone isn’t particularly difficult when using handgrips—for instance, if a rope is tied around it. But using only one’s arms makes it significantly harder and therefore "heavier." The lift then depends on arm length, the strength of the arms and hands (wrists and fingers), the ability to maintain grip (unless one manages to securely “clasp” the hands—a near impossibility when lifting the stone lengthwise), and, of course, leg and back strength as well as balance (technique).

Before the war years, the stone was still frequently "in use." During social events, visiting young men would often gather around it. Here, one could sometimes see the disappointed expressions of strong but inexperienced lifters—proving that raw strength alone wasn’t enough to lift an awkward stone—technique was absolutely required!

Regardless of technical knowledge or training, the lifter’s actual strength still ultimately determines whether he can lift the stone using only arm and hand grip. Many strong men have lifted it the same way and to the same height as Magnus Häggblom in the photograph (autumn 1985). A few strongmen have even achieved the maximum feat: lifting the stone all the way up to their shoulder. Interviews in the winter of 1986 revealed that Georg Järv (b. 1909) had done so, as had Bruno Beijar (1924–1948). Evald Nygård (Nyback Evald, b. 1907) recalls that his mother told him one of the Sundvik brothers (Mårtis Karl? 1871–1940) even carried the stone on his shoulder across the village road between the neighboring farms Nysto and Nyback. During the military occupation of the youth center (1939–1942), a man from Lappfjärd (not Hautaviita!) reportedly lifted the stone rather effortlessly onto his shoulder.

As organized sports progressed in the post-war period, stone lifting gradually faded. Today, the stone is admired only in the summer, resting in front of the Carpella Pavilion.

We may ask: were these lifting efforts merely expressions of youthful playfulness, excess energy, and competitive spirit—the foundations of all physical sports—or

were the “attacks” on the stone perhaps even a ritual act; a deliberate test of manhood, a credential for being regarded as a “true man” or even marriageable? (Cf. Maximilian Stejskal: *Folk Sports*, doctoral dissertation 1954, referring to “lifting stones” in Munsala, Nedervetil, and Terjärv.) Interpreting this as a ritual act with such ethno-sociological significance is likely not applicable in Karperö’s case, since the stone's known presence here is relatively recent. A socio-psychological interpretation, however, might be more fitting: “One man is as good as another!”—and so, attempts were made to grasp the stone, though often without any awareness of what such an act might represent from a social science perspective.

It seems likely that the stone was moved to the youth center shortly after its establishment in 1917. However, it was actually relocated in the 1930s, following the village’s land redistribution, during which the Nysto farm was also moved. This is supported by Per-Erik Beijar (b. 1925), who recalls from childhood that the stone still lay at Nysto—his grandfather’s farm.

But how and when did the stone end up at the Nysto farm? The common belief is that it was found in the archipelago (Hanklot?) by Karperö fishermen and brought by boat along the Strömmen to Karperö. Due to its unique shape, it drew attention where it lay along the shoreline and, as the final step in a chronological journey, ended up on the shore below Nysto—“brought by boat once upon a time,” as Edvin Back puts it. Indeed, the heads of the Nysto household practiced fishing, in addition to farming, in waters around Värlax. Evald Nygård recalls hearing that the farmer at Nysto (Nysto Abb, Abraham Gustavsson Pada-Beijar, 1839–1914) brought the stone home from a fishing trip together with his sons. Based on this, the acquisition of the stone could be dated to the 1880s.

"Too good to be true" or "too true to be good"? Nysto Edvard offers an alternative theory to the common story: When Vasa Steam Mill's original facility at Alkula in Old Vasa ceased operation after its founder, Councilor A.A. Levón, died in August 1875 (a new mill was already operating on Strandgatan in Vasa), Edvard’s grandfather (the aforementioned Nysto Abb) and his brothers bought the machinery and started a new milling business in Karperö on “Ångkvarnsskatan” (Lundas point), the site where the youth center was later built. The stone may have belonged to this purchase and been brought along, possibly used at the new milling site. Even if it wasn’t part of the milling process, it could have served some auxiliary purpose—e.g., for regulation or balance. A metal rod is embedded in one side of the stone. This rod reportedly had a loop attached, which was later removed. The mill operation ended after about six years due to a fire in the 1880s. Thus ends Edvard’s secondary theory.

In the search for truth (“Truth is the highest law of historiography,” a Latin maxim), another idea has been proposed—that the stone may once have served as some kind of anchor for timber rafts. If true, the loop on the metal rod would fit the theory well. However, expert skepticism and eyewitness accounts cast doubt on this: such an anchor stone would need to weigh several hundred kilos. Evald Nygård recalls hearing that the rod with the loop was inserted during the "Nysto farm period" specifically for “finger hook” lifting. The loop was later removed at Nysto.

– In the absence of fully reliable (i.e., written) sources, we may accept the general account of the stone’s early history. During its active "resistance to lifting" era, it became well known—though not always in a purely positive light, as it did pose health risks!

Let us primarily regard this Karperö phenomenon as the lifting stone it has tangibly been for about a hundred years—and not dwell too much on its origins. May it continue to be known by name as the *Karperö Lifting Stone*, but in practice serve as a decorative stone by Carpella.

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