

Haggis Hurling

Haggis hurling is claimed to be a traditional Scottish sport. It is said that the haggis would be prepared for lunch for the man of the family who was out working the croft or cutting peat, by his wife. Scotland is known as a land of rivers and bogs, so walking from the croft house to the place of work could often entail a long way round to cross a river or low lying ground.

In these cases the wife would throw the cooked haggis to the husband, who would catch it using the front apron of his kilt. If he dropped it, he either went hungry; or spent the afternoon scraping his lunch off a rock; or spent the afternoon scraping bits of peat off his lunch.

According to the Guinness Book Of Records, the present World Record for Haggis Hurling is held by Alan Pettigrew of Saltcoats. He threw a 1lb 8 oz Haggis 180 feet 10 inches on the island of Inchmurrin on Loch Lomond in August 1984.

There are a number of rules associated with modern haggis hurling:

- The purpose is to compete for both distance and accuracy from on top of a platform, usually a half a whisky barrel.
- The haggis must be of traditional construction and recipe. Tender boiled sheep's heart, lung and liver with spices, onions, suet and oatmeal and stock stuffed in a sheep's paunch which has then been boiled for three hours. The haggis must land intact: a broken or split haggis results in disqualification.
- At the time of hurling the haggis should be cooled and inspected to ensure no firming agents have been applied. Rules dictate that the haggis must be packed tight and secure, with no extra skin or flab.
- The sporting haggis weighs 500 grams, with a maximum diameter of 18 cm and length of 22 cm. An allowance of ± 30 grams is given and this weight is used in both junior and middle weight events. The heavyweight event allows haggis up to 1 kg in weight, but the standard weight of 850 grams is more common, with an allowance of ± 50 grams.
- Judging is undertaken by the Hagrarian, with the assistance of the Clerk of the Heather and the Steward of the Heather. The Hagrarian checks that each haggis is in order, the Clerk of the Heather blows the hooter to begin the hurl, and the Steward of the Heather measures the hurl (always in feet and inches) and confirms the haggis remains unburst.

But.... is haggis hurling a joke or is it real? It turns out that the answer is both. In 1977, one Robin Dunseath placed an advert in a Scottish national newspaper announcing that at the Gathering of the Clans that year in Edinburgh there would be a revival of the ancient Scottish sport of haggis hurling. The response was unexpected: large numbers of people wanted to take part, and many who did take part then took the sport back to the United States, Canada and Australia, where competitions were established by people who believed they were reviving a traditional Scottish sport extinct since the early 1800s.

The funds raised by the hoax, and from the book that followed about the sport and its supposed history, *The Complete Haggis Hurler* went to charity.

The results since have been amazing. Scottish haggis hurling societies have developed wherever Scots have traditionally settled. And having let the Genie out of the bottle, Robin Dunseath found he couldn't persuade it to go back in. He eventually owned up to the hoax that lay behind the sport, only to find his creature had developed a life of its own, and that while haggis hurling may not actually be a traditional Scottish sport, it soon will be...