The Power of Stone Lifting!-Part I

When you have been lifting for almost twenty years and coaching for almost as long, there are very few things that really impress you. I have seen a lot of different methods of training, but there has been one that has made me stand back and say, WOW!!

Only a few years ago I began stone lifting and have been floored by the results, so much so I think it is a must for anyone that wants to get unbelievably strong! Nope, I don’t even sell them or market them, they are only for serious lifters. Stone lifting is not for the faint of heart and will test your intestinal fortitude just as much as your physical.

Of course stone lifting has been around for thousands of years. It has been used by ancient athletes because of its versatility, strength enhancing effects, and it was sometimes the only thing available. However, in our modern age of being spoiled and finding the easiest way to train, stone training goes against all of that!

Why are stones so effective? Well, they really do train EVERY single muscle in the body. Yes, we have compound lifts that we often say the same about, but no, you can really feel every muscle being worked with stones. You can’t cheat, you can’t get into a specific groove there is no other choice, but to get strong! Specifically, stones strengthen the entire back side of your body, from head to toe. Nope, not deadlifts, cleans, or snatchs, train the body as hard as stones. The demand placed on the posterior chain, upper back, torso, and arms is simply immense.
Sounds like hype right? I thought no big deal till the first time I tried them myself. Not only did I feel it in the above muscles, but my hands as well! Ok, no I did just feel it, I felt it for ten days straight. I was so sore in muscles I didn’t know were there that I knew there was something to this. However, not being a big believer in training just for the pain of it, I was curious to see if stone lifting transferred to anything else. In a few weeks of stone lifting my deadlift went up 15% and my overhead lifts skyrocketed. I can only attribute this to increased hip and trunk strength, not to mention now a killer grip!

**A Few Words of Caution**

I have to admit, it isn’t all roses when it comes to stone lifting. You definitely can find some issues and I would like to share mine when I first began.

1. Too much volume: I think most of us get very excited when we find something fun and effective. In fact, I think our natural tendency is to perform the movement too often. This is exactly what happened to me when I first started stone lifting. I used some form of stone lifting twice a week. Quickly my training partner and I began to develop some horrible biceps and elbow tendonitis pain. Stone lifting takes an immense amount of hand strength and the biceps (working mostly in a static contraction) strength. It is even hard to prepare the body for the type of beating your upper back and arms will take. So, start light and I would begin with training with stones once every two weeks.

2. Tacky!: Some people will say that tacky isn’t necessary for lifting stones. I completely agree, but it depends who we are talking about and the loading. I would advise most beginners to start with tacky as this will take some of the stress off of the arms that gives that nasty tendonitis pain. Plus, it will allow you to work on proper technique without being consumed by the grip factor. You can get tacky at [www.jackalsgym.com](http://www.jackalsgym.com).

3. Forearm Guards: Again, do you HAVE to have them? No, but there are some definite advantages to using forearm guards. For one, there is no performance benefit in not using them, unless you just enjoy pain. Secondly, once you have opened the skin on your forearms enough times you will want to invest in a pair
as it greatly reduces your training time once you do open up the skin. Lastly, I believe it helps in lifting the stone because if you have ever opened up the skin on the forearms that will be in the back of your mind as you are lifting and you may show some hesitation. Sorry, but tacky and gravel into your open wounds isn’t any fun! You can buy a pair of elbow braces at most drug stores, these work great!

**Getting Set-up**

Before we get into the technique we should have everything set-up. The obvious question is, “where do I get stones?” There are two places you can get stones. The first being from a neighboring area outside that wouldn’t miss their stones. Most times these will be river rock stones that are more odd shaped. The other is to make your own from stone molds. This is the method I prefer for a few reasons.

1. I don’t feel like stealing stones.
2. You can create a wide array of sizes from a single mold.
3. Atlas stones can be more versatile than many river rocks.

You can buy very reasonably priced molds that are high quality at [www.slatershardware.com](http://www.slatershardware.com).

Once you are waiting for your concrete to dry you need to start planning where you will perform your stone workouts. A proper stone set-up will consist of having the proper flooring and a loading platform. The flooring has to be appropriate to drop heavy stones upon. This means concrete and cement floors are not ideal! You can also have some small tires available to drop the stones on after you have loaded them onto the platform. This reduces some of the heavy stress on the body when you are first learning stones.

You don’t necessarily have to use platforms, but they will offer you great variety in training and allow you to perform some of the most fundamental lifts. You don’t have to
have an expensive set-up. We use two different methods that are very inexpensive. One is to get some old barrels and place something on top to vary the height (make sure whatever is on top is very sturdy and strong!).

Another method is to build a platform that can fit into your power rack. This is a concept I have stolen from other strongmen. This allows you to vary the height of the loading very easily and you can remove stones just as easily. Strength Coach, Troy Anderson, helped me build my own with a few 4x4s, liquid staples, and double plywood. Make sure to measure your rack carefully and place lips on the back so stones don’t roll out the back end.
Such a platform also gives you a removable rack in case you are limited with space. You can easily remove this platform and still have your rack for your training. So, now you are ready to start training. To build some suspense we are going to go over the technical aspects of stone lifting in Part II. I will also explain how to adapt such methods for
populations where stone lifting may appear to be scary. There are very easy tricks to make this form of training accessible to anyone.

Till then, keep training!!

Josh Henkin is a Performance Coach located in Arizona. To learn more about his innovative training methods and receive his free online newsletter visit www.ifsstrength.com today!

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