

World Porridge Making Championship – Carrbridge Village Hall, 11 & 12 October 2019

The Event – Overview

The World Porridge Making Championship occurs annually in Carrbridge, a Scottish Highland village. 2019 will be its 26th year.

The event is limited to 26 competitors. Several will be from beyond the UK and the competition just to become an international competitor is becoming increasingly fierce. Some will have had to win another competition just to get in here.

All competitors must produce a 'traditional' and 'speciality' dish. Traditional porridge is made from oatmeal (**not** rolled oats or oatflakes), water and salt. No other ingredients are allowed. At the same time as cooking their traditional porridge, competitors cook their speciality dish. This too must use oatmeal, but beyond that 'anything goes'.

The event comprises: (1) *The Golden Spurtle™*, which is awarded to the competitor judged to have produced the best 'traditional' porridge. They receive the title of World Porridge Making Champion. (2) *The Duncan Hilditch Memorial Quaich*, which is awarded to the competitor judged to have produced the best 'speciality' porridge dish. (3) *The Silver Spurtle*, a parallel competition for 8-16s, again with prizes for the best traditional and best speciality dish.

The Golden Spurtle competition is sponsored by Hamlyns of Scotland. The Silver Spurtle competition is sponsored by Centurion Plumbing Services (Scotland) Ltd.

This year, the Silver Spurtle competition will be held on **Friday 11 October**, with the Golden Spurtle occurring on **Saturday 12 October**.

Background/history

On porridge –

The origin of porridge is lost in the mists of time. Archaeologists have found it in 5000 year old corpses so we know it's at least that old. Most countries have a dish that resembles the porridge we know today. It is made from a variety of ingredients – barley in the Far East; semolina in the southern hemisphere; corn in the Americas (grits) and juk in Korea.

Back in the day, many Scottish kitchens had a "dresser". Some of these dressers – allegedly - had a "porridge drawer". This drawer would be lined and cleaned out at the start of the week. The family porridge would then be made for the whole week and poured into the drawer to set and cool. The family would be given slices of cold porridge for various meals throughout the week with the process starting again on the Monday. Or that is the story ... Some families can recount their grandparents' memories of the porridge drawer; others dispute their accuracy, saying 'why wouldn't they just use a big pot to cook it up every day?' But perhaps this is to miss that today we serve and eat porridge hot ...

On the history of the competition in Carrbridge

The first Golden Spurtle World Porridge Making Championship was held in Carrbridge on 11 September 1994.

The event was the brain child of Roger Reed, then owner of the Fairwinds Hotel Carrbridge, and Secretary of the Carrbridge Community Council. Its aim – to raise the profile of Carrbridge (to put it on the map, and to attract visitors in the then 'shoulder season') and to do that through the promotion of a healthy food, porridge.

In 2012 Roger recalled the first competition:

“At the time I was a member of the Community Council and, I think, the village tourist organisation. I was out walking the dog in the woods behind Fairwinds one day, thinking of how to promote Carrbridge. I knew that other small villages around the UK had world championships – conkers, tiddly winks and marbles etc. What could Carrbridge do? I used to make the porridge at Fairwinds and the idea of World Porridge came to mind. I went down to the Ecclefechan (Restaurant) to put the idea to Duncan Hilditch. In a very short time we decided that it would be possible to hold a competition in making porridge. Everybody had their own way of making porridge. Could we find the best? Duncan was sure that he knew enough top chefs to act as judges. We then drew up the rules for making basic porridge. We decided that to add interest we would add a speciality section where the competitors could let their imagination take over. It was probably all sorted in an hour or so. Duncan sorted out the judges. I organised the event. I put the idea to the Community Council; they approved and funded the initial event and (many) subsequent years. It was never intended to make money but not lose too much. Simple idea really”.

Entries in the first year came from all over Scotland, including from Dunoon and Iona. The first judges were all from a catering background. Chief judge was Bill Kendrew (a catering lecturer at Telford College). He was assisted by Robert Bruce (chef of Baxters of Speyside) and Derek Stewart (a lecturer at Lauder College, Dunfermline).

More recently, as the profile of the event has grown, it has attracted an increasing number of international competitors. Last year’s event attracted competitors from the US, Australia, Germany, Sweden, Estonia, Finland and Russia as well as from Scotland, Ireland and England.

Today, under sponsorship, the event remains true to the principles established by its founders. It continues to be a means to promote Carrbridge through all things porridge, and it remains a not-for-profit activity. To that end, in 2010 the World Porridge Making Championship teamed with the Scottish-based charity, Mary’s Meals to establish an International World Porridge Day – 10 October every year. Half of the proceeds of any profit made by the Championship go to support the work of Mary’s Meals. The remainder goes to the Community Council to support the community of Carrbridge.

Cooking porridge

There are various ways of making porridge – and many arguments about how to.

Whilst some may be content with the microwave version, the World Porridge Making Championship celebrates cooking porridge. So, ingredients matter.

First, there’s the oats. Oats are technical. Whole oats are called groats. These are the seeds of harvested oats, with the outer husks removed. Removing the husks is the first stage of the production process. The outer husks can be used in animal feed. Groats are then heated and dried in kilns. This removes their moisture and gives them their typically nutty flavour. It also allows them to be stored for longer. What happens next depends on whether they are being used to produce porridge oats or oatmeal. They are steamed, rolled and flaked to produce ‘rolled oats’ or ‘oatflakes’, which cook relatively quickly. Whole groats are rolled too. They produce chunkier oats which take slightly longer to cook. Oatmeal (the basic ingredient for the World Porridge Making Championship) is produced by milling groats, using either steel blade cutting techniques or stone wheel grinding. Various grades of oatmeal are produced: fine (oat flour), medium and pinhead. Pinhead oatmeal is the whole groat. It takes longer to cook than rolled oats or stoneground oatmeal, and many prefer to soak it in cold water overnight.

Water or milk? Or both? Sweet or savoury?

Irrespective of personal taste once it’s served, Scots advocate that it only contains salt, water and oats in the cooking, which is why these are the rules for the World Porridge Making Championship.

Spurtles –

The spurtle is a traditional tool made for stirring porridge whilst it is being cooked. It is designed to eradicate the lumps that can form when cooking. It is rod shaped, usually about 25cm long and is always made from wood.

The exact history of the spurtle is unclear. In its present form it is known to have existed since at least the 15th Century. Typically they were made by the person who used them, from any locally available wood, so from a branch or sometimes a root with a sharp knife or other implement.

There are two types of spurtle: (1) a rod spurtle, a simple straight piece of wood; (2) a couthie spurtle (meaning plain) which has a flat blade at one end. These are more difficult to make but had the advantage of being capable of being used to turn other items like eggs or oatcakes etc. The rod spurtle is by far the most popular today. It is usually turned on a lathe. They can be regularly shaped or tapered. It's a matter of personal choice.

The top of each spurtle is decorated with various designs. Stags heads, orbs and triangle designs all feature but by far the most common is a stylised thistle because it is the national emblem of Scotland.

Spurtles are usually left unpainted and untreated in order that they can be freely used in food preparation. They are usually dishwasher proof.

When using a spurtle, tradition has it that it should be used with the right hand and stirred clockwise (to keep out the devil).

Competitors' recipes

Porridge cooking at the Golden Spurtle goes to a completely different level to that of the basic breakfast. This year's competitors' recipes will be a closely guarded secret. Here though are examples of previous winners' recipes:

<https://goldenspurtle.com/recipes/>

This year's competition

We will update information on the main website regarding this year's competitors and judges once this is available (June 2019).

Additional resources

1: Image gallery

In addition to the images available under Gallery, there is a full range of free-to-use, full resolution images available here:

http://www.pbase.com/carrhighlander/world_porridge_making_championships

Photo credits **must** be used – please credit James Ross in all reproductions.

2: Major sponsors:

Golden Spurtle – Hamlyns of Scotland

<https://hamlynsoats.co.uk>

<https://www.instagram.com/hamlynsoats/>

<https://twitter.com/hamlynsoats>

<https://www.facebook.com/Hamlyns>

Silver Spurtle – Centurion Plumbing Services (Scotland) Ltd

<https://www.centurionplumbingservices.co.uk/>

3: Additional links

Mary's Meals

<https://www.marysmeals.org.uk/>

4: Golden Spurtle

<https://www.facebook.com/GoldenSpurtle>

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5: Contact

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