

LINVILLE, N.C. — Scotland returns to Grandfather Mountain July 12-15 for the 63rd annual Grandfather Mountain Highland Games.

Boasting bagpipes, Scottish athletics, Highland melodies, Celtic cuisine, crafts aplenty and tons of tartans, the Games hearken back to the rich cultural traditions of Scotland in a setting not so different from the mountains and glens some 3,600 miles away.

The event begins Thursday afternoon, July 12, with border collie sheepherding demonstrations, Celtic entertainment, the running of “The Bear” and the opening ceremonies.

“The Bear” pits approximately 700 runners against the steep switchbacks of Grandfather Mountain in a five-mile run that climbs 1,568 feet from the town of Linville to the mountain summit.

It’s followed Saturday by another test of extreme endurance as the Grandfather Mountain Marathon winds from Appalachian State University in Boone to the site of the Games in Linville.

But the Games truly get under way at the torchlight ceremony on Thursday evening, where representatives of more than 100 clans announce their families’ participation in the gathering. The “raising of the clans” proclaims that they have once again convened to celebrate their heritage.

Guests often bring dinner or purchase concessions at the field to enjoy a picnic at the opening ceremonies.

Friday, Saturday and Sunday are filled with competitions in traditional heavyweight Scottish athletic events, highland dancing competitions, bagpipe band parades, piping, drumming and harp competitions, sheepherding demonstrations by Scottish border collies and concerts, featuring a colorful soundscape of Celtic music.

The nation’s top Scottish athletes clash Saturday in traditional heavyweight events, such as “Turning the Caber” and “Tossing the Sheaf.”

In the caber toss, athletes flip a telephone pole-sized log end over end. The sheaf toss challenges athletes to loft a 16-pound sack of hay over a bar more than 20 feet high.

Other ancient tests of strength await the contestants, including highland wrestling, the hammer throw and various weight throws.

Events are repeated Sunday for amateurs and athletes 40 and older, in addition to the “Kilted Mile,” clan caber toss and clan tug-of-war.

For the wee ones, the Games will again host youth highland wrestling clinics and competitions, foot races and tug-of-war battles.

MUSIC

For 2018, event organizers are tuning up the Games’ musical offerings.

Friday nights' Celtic rock show includes sets by Seven Nations, Nic Hudson, Rathkeltair, Scottish Octopus and Blue Ridge Brass, while the Saturday Celtic sessions feature Alasdair White, Ed Miller, Chambless and Muse, Seamus Kennedy and Piper Jones Band.

Other performers throughout the weekend's daytime musical offerings include Billy Jackson & Gráinne Hambly, Atlantic North, Brothers McLeod and Marybeth McQueen.

For more information, call (828) 733-1333, or email gmhginfo@yahoo.com.

HISTORY IN ACTION

Throughout the weekend, visitors can learn about their own Scottish ancestry and genealogy at clan tents or browse the open-air market for Gaelic and tartan gift items.

Guests can take a taste of tradition with a variety of concessions, including Scottish meat pies.

The Scottish Cultural Village will also return, hosting experts to discuss or demonstrate numerous aspects of Scottish culture, including blacksmithing, weaving, spinning, athletics, piping and drumming, dancing and more. Presentations will take place every 30 minutes throughout the weekend.

IF YOU ATTEND

Adult admission to the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games is \$15 Thursday, \$20 Friday, \$30 Saturday and \$15 Sunday. Tickets cover all activities in the meadows, which last from early morning to midnight Friday and Saturday. Tickets are \$5 each day for children ages 5-12, and children younger than 5 enter free.

Tickets for Thursday night's opening ceremonies are \$15 for adults and \$5 for children ages 5-12. Tickets for the Celtic rock concert only (no Friday Games activities) are \$15 for adults or \$5 for children (ages 5-12). The Saturday night concert is also \$15 for adults and \$5 for children (ages 5-12). This does not include admission to the Saturday Games activities.

Tickets purchased on site must be paid with cash, and credit cards will only be accepted at the Games' main entrance gate.

Four-day passes are also available by calling (828) 733-1333. Adult passes are \$75 (including shuttle), and children's passes are \$30 (also including shuttle).

Parking is available at the Games on Thursday and Friday on a first come, first served basis, with overflow parking at shuttle lots in Linville Friday only (no shuttle buses run on Thursday). Public parking is not available at the Games on Saturday and Sunday.

Shuttle service is provided for a fee between MacRae Meadows and satellite parking areas in Linville, Newland and Boone. Shuttle fees vary depending on the distance between the lots and MacRae Meadows, costing \$5 for Linville and Newland and \$10 for Boone.

For more information about the Games, visit www.gmhg.org, or call (828) 733-1333. For lodging and travel information, contact the High Country Host visitor center at (800) 438-7500 or highcountryhost.com.

About the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation:

The not-for-profit Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation strives to inspire conservation of the natural world by helping guests explore, understand and value the wonders of Grandfather Mountain. For more information, call (800) 468-7325, or visit www.grandfather.com to plan a trip.

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