

Olympic Legacy of Ancient Greece and Washington State

Series of articles by Dan Youra, travel writer

Dan Youra compares the first Olympic Games in ancient Greece with the Olympic legacy in Washington State, where Olympic Mountains cast a spell across Olympic National Park. Ancient Greek games in Olympia were dedicated to Zeus. Washington's Olympia is shadowed by Mount Olympus, "Home of the Gods". Greek cities welcomed pilgrims to Olympic festivals 2,800 years ago. Washington towns on the Olympic Peninsula host festivals in the spirit of the original Olympic Games.

Washington's Olympic Legacy on Olympic Peninsula

By Dan Youra, travel writer

The Olympic spark was first ignited in the new world in 1788, just 12 years after the colonial declaration of independence. While sailing off the coast of what is now Washington State, the British sea captain, John Meares, christened the majestic, glacier-covered peaks with this inspired proclamation:

"If that be not the home where dwell the gods, it is certainly beautiful enough to be, and I therefore call it Mount Olympus".

Since its English christening, the northwest peninsula has been recognized as an idyllic sanctuary worthy of a name inspired by the divine mythologies of ancient Greece.

What Captain Meares did not realize when he nominated the white-topped peaks as "Home of the Gods" was that the native peoples, who inhabited the nearby coasts, had long revered the spirit powers of the same majestic mountains, which they called *Sun-a-do*, protector of the tribes.

One of the most powerful spirits for the native peoples was Thunderbird, whom they knew to live in the "Lair of Thunderbird" on Blue Glacier high atop Mt. Olympus. Their legends sing the praises of the winged god who swooped down from his lair to pluck a giant whale from the ocean and deliver it to a starving tribe on the coast.

Three short years after Captain Meares proclaimed the divine residency of the mountains, British explorer, Captain Vancouver, entered a notation in his ship's log, identifying the land around Mt. Olympus as "Olympic Peninsula".

In the 1840's the forested land and snow-capped mountains were officially recognized by the young United States government as the *Olympic Peninsula*. In succeeding years individual peaks of the Mt. Olympus massif were named by mountaineers for Greek, Roman, Germanic and Norse gods.

The names of Greek gods gracing the peaks of Mt. Olympus are Athena, Athena's owl, Aphrodite, Apollo, Aries, Circe, Hermes, Icarus, Pan and Poseidon. The Roman god of merchants, Mercury, is immortalized on his own peak.

Germanic and Norse gods, whose name badges are pinned on the Olympic Mountain peaks, are Baldur, Bragi, Freki, Frigga, Geri, Hugin, Loki, Munin, Steipner, Thor, Mimir, Valhallas, Valkyrie, Vidar, Vili and Woden.

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