

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.

2. Sacred Places for Olympic Festivals

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Greek Sacred Festival Sites

Greece's Olympic festivals took place on a four-year schedule at the four sacred sanctuaries, each dedicated to a Greek god: Olympia and Nemea dedicated to Zeus; Delphi to Apollo; and, Isthmia to Poseidon. In most cases arduous journeys were required to sail the winds and currents to distant shores, followed by heart pumping hikes over mountains, across rivers, to arrive at the sometimes remote sanctuaries awaiting pilgrims and participants. In the earliest games everyone was a participant, not just a spectator.

Olympia

It's the water. Year round rivers made the valley of Olympia attractive and capable of hosting the celebrants attending the festival and games. On the site were constructed temples, gymnasia, markets and viewing areas.

Delphi

The festivals at the sanctuary of Delphi, dedicated to Apollo and not Zeus, were ranked second to those at Olympia based on reputation. Delphi, noted for its oracle, was believed to be in the center of the inhabited world and people called it the naval of the earth. More easily accessible by sea it was in the very center of Greece.

Isthmia

The festivals at Isthmia, dedicated to Poseidon, were staged in valleys that do not have as fertile soil, easy access to water and the more prestigious temples so popular at Olympia and Delphi. Isthmia was prized for its strategic importance.

Nemea

The site at Nemea, dedicated to Zeus, had neither the charm of Olympia, nor the grandeur of Delphi, nor the strategic importance of Isthmia. Excavations on the site have revealed a glimpse to its past – a stadium, sanctuary, water channels, spas, public area, temple to Zeus, and what seems to have been a hostelry where pilgrims stayed.

Olympic Peninsula Festival Sites

The geography of the Olympic Peninsula is dominated by the massive and other worldly majesty of Olympic National Park. The park's 1442 square miles of Olympic Mountains were crowned with national park status in 1938. From the glacier-topped Mount Olympus to the giant firs and cedars of Olympic National Forest the park is home to hundreds of species of wildlife, including 300 species of birds. Around the park Native American tribes and small towns survive, most with a heritage rich in fishing and logging.

The scenic drive around the Olympic Peninsula is commonly referred to as the "Olympic Loop". After the completion of Highway 101 in 1932, visitors were invited to *Tour The Olympic Loop*. In 1933 the Olympic Peninsula Resort and Hotel Association banded together resort owners to promote travel and offer their hospitality to arriving guests. The famous Highway 101, which is a ribbon along the west coast of the contiguous United States, actually begins in Olympia, Washington, makes a loop around the east, north

and west perimeter of Olympic National Park, before unwinding on its trip through Oregon and California. Washington's Olympic Loop is connected across the south of the Olympic Peninsula by State Route 8.

Four distinct regions encircle Olympic National Park and define the geography and communities that inhabit its foothills and shores.

Hood Canal on the eastern flank of the Olympic Peninsula is a 90-mile long fiord connecting Kitsap Peninsula to Olympic Peninsula. At Port Gamble near its north entrance the Hood Canal Bridge, at one mile in length, the world's longest floating bridge over salt water, welcomes travelers who ferried across Puget Sound from Seattle or who spanned the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. Squamish and Hoodspout on south Hood Canal welcome visitors along Highway 101. Friendly emerald towns open their arms, beaches and river roads winding up to the high country campgrounds and lakes of Olympic Park.

Strait of Juan de Fuca along the north coast of the peninsula washes the communities in the heart of the hills, where travelers drive up to Hurricane Ridge, the most easily accessible route to view Mt. Olympus and the expansive panorama of Olympic Mountain peaks at the center of it all. A nearby port is an international entry point for visitors traveling by ferry from Canada.

Pacific Beaches frame the west end's wild side of the peninsula. Tatoosh Island at the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Cape Flattery, most northwest point of the lower-48 states, protect Neah Bay, home of the Native American Makah tribe, hosts of the annual Makah Days festival August 23-25, one of the largest gatherings of native peoples in the northwest. Surfers search out the waves on First Beach in La Push to test their board skills. The beach is a popular shrine for readers of the *Twilight* book series with stories set on the Olympic Coast. The visitor center in the Hoh Rain Forest is a popular staging area for hikers heading up the Hoh River and for climbing teams leaving to ascend Mt. Olympus.

Olympic Forests stretch across the south flank of the Olympic Peninsula from Puget Sound's fiords around Olympia and Shelton to the green hills of Aberdeen and Hoquiam. The two cities on the shores of Grays Harbor are welcome points to travelers arriving up Highway 101 and jumping off points for visitors heading for fishing fleet festivals in Westport, seafood festivals in Ocean Shores and kite flying in coastal towns.

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Legal claimer: Olympic Peninsula Travel Association was founded in 1933 and is exempted from restrictions on the use of the word "Olympic" as defined by the 1978 Amateur Sports Act for "any person who used the word "Olympic" for any lawful purpose prior to September 21, 1950".

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