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Olympic Legacy of Ancient Greece in Olympic National Park USA

by

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Series of seven articles compares Olympic games of ancient Greece 3000 years ago to their legacy on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State USA, where Mount Olympus, *Home of the Gods*, casts its spell across majestic Olympic National Park, sole UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Great Pacific Northwest.

Part 1 Olympic Games from Zeus to Whistler

In the beginning the Greek gods created the Olympic Games. Lavish festivals of music, worship and athletic competition are richly recounted among the myths of Zeus, Apollo and Poseidon – gods for whom the games were held.

Heracles (Roman: *Hercules*), legendary Greco-Roman hero, known for his super human strength, is credited with founding the Olympic Games at idyllic Olympia in honor of his father Zeus.

Zeus descended from Mt. Olympus, “Home of the Gods,” and saw that the festivals were good. He said, “Let the games begin.” And, the games did begin around 776 BCE and continued at four-year intervals as part of Olympian Festivals in four sacred locations scattered around ancient Greece in Olympia, Delphi, Isthmia and Nemea.

Pilgrims trekked great distances from around the Mediterranean Sea to participate in the festivals and enjoy fine arts, music and displays of athletic skills. Competitors in track and field vied for an olive branch, ordained by Heraclues as the crown and sole reward for the victor of the games.

The line between myth and fact is not easy to define. Some accounts indicate that the games originated in an annual foot race, run by girls, for the privilege of becoming the priestess of the Moon-goddess Hera. When Zeus married Hera – when, that is, a new form of sacred kingship had been introduced into Greece – a second foot race was run by young men for the privilege of becoming the priestess’s consort. Thereafter, the annual races were run by men every four years.

The games lasted 1200 years and ended in 394 CE, when they were abolished by the Roman emperor and the Olympic sites were destroyed by Gothic invasions from the north. Two earthquakes and a flood obliterated Olympia. The ruins lay hidden for 14 centuries, until rediscovered by archaeologists in 1829.





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The modern Olympic Games reignited the torch to open the 1896 games in Athens, Greece. Twenty-five Olympic Games have been hosted since its rebirth 114 years ago. Beijing, China, hosted the 25th Olympiad in 2008.

Vancouver, Canada – a Salish Sea neighbor of Washington State's Olympic Peninsula – will host the 2010 Olympic Winter Games at Whistler with opening ceremony on February 12 and closing ceremony on February 28, 2010. Paralympics will be held in March.

End of Part 1 – Olympic Games from Zeus to Whistler

Seven Articles in Olympic Legacy Series

- Part 1 – **Olympic Games from Zeus to Whistler**
- Part 2 – **Home of The Gods in The New World**
- Part 3 – **Tribute to the Gods and to Nature**
- Part 4 – **Sacred Festival Sites**
- Part 5 – **Pilgrims Attend Olympic Festivals**
- Part 6 – **Festivals For Mind and Body**
- Part 7 – **Success of Ancient and Modern Olympic Events**

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