



OlyGOLD.com

Olympic Legacy of Ancient Greece in Olympic National Park USA

by

Dan Youra

Travel writer and president of Olympic Peninsula Travel Association



1932 2010
78th Anniversary
OPTA.us

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 2

Home of The Gods in The New World

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, British sea captain, John Meares, christened the majestic, glacier-covered peaks with his 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 Mount Olympus as *Olympic Peninsula*.

In the 1840s 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 on the Mount Olympus massif were named by mountaineers for Greek, Roman, Germanic and Norse gods.





OlyGOLD.com

page 2



1932 2010
78th Anniversary
OPTA.us

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 Olympic Mountain peaks, are Baldur, Bragi, Freki, Frigga, Geri, Hugin, Loki, Munin, Steipner, Thor, Mimir, Valhallas, Valkyrie, Vidar, Vili and Woden.

End of Part 2 – Home of The Gods in The New World

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**

Dan Youra, author of Olympic Legacy series of articles, is president of Olympic Peninsula Travel Association OPTA and lives on Washington State's Olympic Peninsula. Contact the author at dan @ youra.com.

Olympic Peninsula Travel Association
P.O. Box 1169 • Port Hadlock, WA 98339 • www.OPTA.us

© MMX Youra Media, USA

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.

