



Reminders of the Distant Past: Olympic Peninsula Rainforests

By [RJ Wattenhofer](#) | Submitted On December 18, 2011



Where once mighty temperate rainforests stretched from Oregon, through Western Canada and up into Alaska, now stand a few remote strips and patches of woodlands, the diminutive remnants of the forests' former greatness. Human exploitation and climatic change have both contributed to the rainforests' accelerated demise, shrinking them to little less than ten square miles in area. Fortunately, wiser heads prevailed at a critical juncture and through their actions, the last remaining old growth stands have been preserved for future generations to enjoy.

The four remaining temperate rainforests are located on the Olympic Peninsula West of Seattle in Washington State. President Franklin D. Roosevelt created Olympic National Park in 1938, and it is within the confines of this 1,441 square mile preservation site that the rainforests of the Bogachiel river valley, Queets, Hoh and Quinault are found. The two most easily accessible woodlands are the Quinault and Hoh, both with roads leading right up to their respective ranger stations.

Located in the immediate area are several lodges where you can reside during your vacation stay, some being within a few feet of entrance trails leading directly to the heart of the rainforests. This writer's personal favorite vacation destination is the Lake Quinault Lodge, situated on the Southeast shore of Lake Quinault and less than a mile off the main thoroughfare, Highway 101. Built in 1926, this massive and beautifully constructed hotel is perfectly located within thirty feet of a main Quinault rainforest portal, allowing ease of entrance for either short jaunts or an extended excursion.

Immediately upon entering the rainforest you are transported into a primeval wonderland; everywhere you look the sight is most awe-inspiring. The excitement that wells up in your chest must certainly be reminiscent of the emotion felt by our ancient ancestors when they first laid eyes on the forests. The initial imagery that strikes you is the almost incandescent green glow of the lush flora that cover every inch of ground and climb to the heavens along the mammoth Sitka spruce trees. This is truly a stunning vision not to be found anywhere else on the planet.

The footpath winds around some three miles through the rainforest, taking you back to your point of origin after a good two-hour hike. During your walk, you will see quite clearly why this is referred to as a rainforest: Everything is moist to the touch and beads of water drip off the trees that arch above the trail high overhead.

If you are lucky, you may spot a Roosevelt Elk. These enormous beasts are found only in the Olympic National Park and are as much a part of the rainforests as the trees, plants and moss. Almost hunted to extinction in the Nineteenth Century, in 1909 President Theodore Roosevelt created the Mount Olympus National Monument to protect them. Today the park hosts over five thousand of these creatures, adding an extra element of exciting diversity to an area already richly diverse.

It is no surprise that most people, having visited the rainforests, leave with a new appreciation for the importance of conserving our natural resources and why this last remaining link to our country's primitive past must be maintained. Through the efforts of dedicated conservationists, this rainforest promises to stay with us for many years to come.

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