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Before there was an Olympic National Park, there was the Klahhane Club.

“The object of the Klahhane Club,” according to one of the original bylaws, “Is to bring together in the bond of good-fellowship, all lovers of the out-of doors in the country tributary to Port Angeles, the Gateway to the Olympics.”

That gateway, to the people who founded the club in 1915, was Mount Angeles, south of Port Angeles. The club leased a two-story cabin on the mountain’s north face to use as a camping spot.

“A sizeable portion of the town turned out Saturday afternoons to walk up the six-mile road, camp for the night, then climb the four and half mile mountain Sunday and walk all the way back to town the same evening, a mere 10 miles,” according to one account. The cabin was used every weekend.

One of the club’s mainstays was E. B. Webster, publisher of the *Olympic-Leader* newspaper. To him, Mount Angeles was “the friendly mountain,” and the club persuaded the state Game Commission to include the area in a game preserve, which meant no hunting.

Vandals burned the cabin down on Sept. 24, 1929, and the club developed other facilities.

There was a clubhouse built in 1922 on the bluff south of the present Red Lion Hotel on Front Street. Besides being a meeting place, it served as a museum and an aviary – Webster was interested in birds. It was sold in 1933.

In 1924, the club acquired a former sanitarium on the north shore of Lake Crescent and developed it as Klahhane Gardens. Rock gardens, developed by Webster with more than 1,100 plants, and birds were added along with private cabins. About a decade later, the original owners regained the property. Today, Clallam County operates it as Camp David Junior.

In 1932 Klahhane Gardens was moved to Webster property at Heart o’ the Hills, south of Port Angeles, and Klahhane Lodge was built. E. B. Webster died in 1936, when the family turned the gardens over to the U. S. Forest Service. The gardens and lodge were maintained until the 1950s, when a new road to Hurricane Ridge cut off access to the gardens, so that today the gardens have long been overwhelmed by surrounding vegetation.

During the 1920s, Webster and the club helped introduce wild goats from Alaska to the Olympics, along with wild turkeys and Hungarian partridges. The birds died out, while the goats multiplied and today are a large pest in the park. For Webster and his family—who contributed so much to the culture and well-being of the Peninsula—it was a rare misjudgment.

Webster and the club supported the creation of Olympic National Park in 1938.

The fourth club-associated facility would be used as clubhouse – returning to its hiking mission –and is used to the present day.

A stream was dammed to create Lake Dawn, south of Port Angeles, and a club member acquired land near the lake. In the early 1930s, Klahhane Cabin was built and is used to this day for monthly potlucks and Thanksgiving and Christmas parties. Klahhane is a Chinook term meaning “a good time out of doors.”

In 1920, with a membership of 160, three made it to the summit Mount Olympus. The club offered two or three hikes a month.

In 1915, Webster, as chairman of the Outing Committee, wrote this report:

“The 1915 outing of eight days crossing Mt. Angeles from our lodge and returning via the Elwha River, set a new record in time respects. It was the first time that a party the majority of whom were women – and not seasoned mountaineers at that, but girls–spent the entire length of time on top of the mountains packing the entire commissary, sleeping and other equipment, without the aid of horses or caches. It was the longest trip, in the matter of hours of actual traveling, ever taken by such a party covering an equal distance, much of the work requiring the use of one’s hands as well as feet, and at other times, the assistance of a rope. And the expense, including transportation of supplies to the lodge, and an automobile stage in from the Elwha bridge, was probably the lowest, being \$4.67 per person.”

Today, instead of girls, the membership reflects the area’s retirement demographic.

“The average age is in the 60s, maybe the 70s,” said Kim Weimer, past club president, adding that all ages are welcome. The club’s Port Angeles base has shifted to Sequim, he said.

Current membership is about 160, although many did not participate in the hikes offered three times a week –all-day ones on Wednesdays and Saturdays as well as Sunday afternoons.

For more information on joining, check out the club website.