3 Olympia

As far as we know, the first athletic contests, which
grew into the Olympics, were held at Olympia on the
west coast of the Peloponnese. Olympia was originally a
field planted with trees. The Hill of Kronos, named after
Zeus' father, was next to the
field. The Altis was at the foot
of this hill. The River Kladeos
ran down from the high
mountains alongside the site.

By the sixth century BC
temples, sports facilities and
monuments had been built.
Buildings were always being
modified or pulled down and
new ones put in their place.

In this book the site is described as it may have looked in
about 100 BC.

The stadium
For several hundred years, running races were held on a
straight, level stretch of ground inside the Altis. The finish
was near the Altar of Zeus. Spectators watched from the
Hill of Kronos.

In about 350 BC, a new stadium was built outside the
Altis. The track was about 192 metres long and about
35 metres wide. Legend said that Heracles fixed the length
of the track by measuring out 600 of his own footsteps!

Earth was piled up round the track for 20,000
spectators to stand or sit on. So that everyone had a good
view, the banks along the two longer sides curved in at the
ends. A channel of water ran round the edge of the track.

This gave spectators and runners a chance to refresh
themselves during their long, hot day in the sun.