

Generations of Trailblazers

For 36 years, a White Salmon family has built public access to wild places

By Drew Myron

Avery Hoyt does not remember a single moment of his first venture into the forest.

Not the 10-mile trek into old-growth forest. Not the cold journey over a 6,000-foot pass, and not the two weeks huddled in a tent. Avery does not recall any of his time in North Cascades National Park, because he was just 16 days old.

Avery's mother, Krista Thie, had just given birth when work called. She and her husband, Daryl Hoyt, swaddled the baby and hiked into the woods.

For the family of professional trail builders who live in White Salmon, this was just another day at the "office."

Twin Oaks Construction

Three decades later, the trio still works in remote places with difficult access. Founded in 1979, Twin Oaks Construction is one of the oldest trail building companies in the Pacific Northwest.

Working with city, state and federal agencies, the family has built and improved more than 50 wilderness trails, with most of their work in Oregon and Washington.

"They have done work on trails, trail bridges and other trail structures that is unequaled in the world," says Michael Passo, executive director of the Professional TrailBuilders Association. "Quality trail construction requires a specialized set of skills that other types of construction companies simply do not have. The only way to get these skills is through extensive experience and collaboration with other quality trail builders."

Their work typically includes building new trails, bridges and stairs, as well as maintaining existing paths and structures.



At their home base in White Salmon, the Hoyt family holds essential tools of the trade. From left, Krista with a McLeod, Daryl with a pick mattock and a Pulaski, and Avery grips a sledgehammer.

They recently built bridges at Wallace Falls State Park near Seattle, restored and improved the Oaks Bottom Bluff Trail in Portland, and created new trail at Admiralty Inlet Preserve on Whidbey Island in Washington.

Daryl, Krista and Avery are the core of this niche business, but they often bring in friends and family to help.

"I never imagined this would turn into a business," says Krista, a botanist who grew up hiking with her family in and around Whidbey Island.

How it Began

Krista and Daryl have always enjoyed hiking and exploring the outdoors. A few years into their marriage, Daryl asked, "What can we do together and enjoy?"

Trail work was the answer, and a business was born.

Favoring Difficult Projects

"We favor difficult and challenging projects," says Avery, 32. "We're interested in making the natural world accessible for everyone."

The trio often hikes 10 to 20 miles just to get to the work. Sometimes the site is inaccessible by foot, and they must ferry crew and equipment across water. Such was the case with the Lake Chelan project, an effort that consumed two seasons and saw 16 inches of snow in mid-September.

"That was a rude awakening," says Daryl, who comes from tough stock. His father was a logger and his grandfather ran a lumber mill.

Tools of the Trade

Adding to the remote access is the challenge of working in difficult terrain. Every project is compact and requires small equipment. Because hauling heavy gear long distances is impossible, every tool is chosen—or custom-made—for size and efficiency.

“The power wheelbarrow is the backbone of the trail business,” Avery says.

Narrow and hydraulic, with a 1,000-pound capacity, the wheelbarrow is essential to haul rock, compressors and tools.

Other critical equipment includes a small excavator, measuring just 30 inches with the ability to extend another 10 inches; and two small generators that can plug into each other to double the output of power.

In wilderness areas where chainsaws are prohibited, “old-fashioned” hand tools are essential: a crosscut saw, pick mattock, McLeod and Pulaski.

Armed with these essentials, the crew adds its own strength, endurance and experience to drill rock, haul gravel, remove fallen logs, cut roots and blast through rough terrain.

Under the Stars

To keep the project moving, the family stays as close to the work site as possible, camping in tents and trailers, and occasionally renting a house. They typically stick with a project until completion, as weather, fire season, and plant and animal protections allow.

That means sleeping under the stars and beneath the rain—for weeks and sometimes months—on end.

Not all projects are in the far reaches of the woods. Sometimes the woods are right in the city. The team built four bridges and one mile of new hiking trail at Marquam Nature Park, a 178-acre oasis just minutes from downtown Portland.

They also rebuilt trail in Portland’s Sellwood neighborhood. They camped in Oaks Bottom Wildlife Refuge, the city’s first wildlife refuge—just 400 feet from the Oaks Amusement Park roller coaster.



The Twin Oaks Construction crew in action, building boardwalks and a bridge in Oaks Bottom Wildlife Refuge and Marquam Park in Portland.

Photo courtesy of Twin Oaks Construction

Tough Constitution Required

There is one thing Daryl does not want to hear: “You build trails? That must be fun!”

For this work, he says, you must be physically fit, willing to work in the woods for three and four months at a stretch—without Internet, phone, friends or conveniences—and endure bug bites, heavy rains and early snow.

“When you’re out working weeks and weeks, it has a special quality to it, the woods become your home,” Daryl says. “But when the snow is crashing your tent, and the rain is measured in inches, you have to take the outdoors as it comes.”

The test, Daryl says, is, “Can you keep a chainsaw running in the rain?”

All About Family

“It’s construction work,” says Avery. “But it’s family from the start.”

Avery was just a child when he joined the team. Krista’s father was 97 when he joined them on a project and hiked the 2-mile-long Ice Cave Trail Bridge.

“As a society, we don’t have a lot of opportunity to do something physical together,” Daryl says. “It’s really special to have a sense of doing something together.”

Now, after 36 years, Daryl and Krista are ready to share the business they have honed. They are handing shovels and saws to Avery.

“It’s really special,” Avery says. “And it’s a lot of responsibility,”

The Trail Ahead

As trails have improved and use has expanded to include cyclists and other recreationalists, the Twin Oaks team is happy to see more people than ever have opportunities to enjoy nature.

“I had tears at Lake Serene,” says Krista, referring to a project an hour outside of Seattle, in Washington’s Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. “To see so many people go up those 600 steps we built, there’s something so satisfying. I hope that others will have the opportunity to experience this.

“It’s a very loving production with a shared sense of teamwork and accomplishment. We try to create a real shared sense of ownership. Each person is working for the good of the whole.” ■

For more information, call Twin Oaks Construction at (503) 757-3762 or go to www.twinoakstrails.com.