



Brad Smith loves digging out old steam engines that rolled across Midwest farms in the late 1800's and early 1900's. "I'm preserving pieces of history," he says.

## Steam Engine "Archaeologist" Loves Digging Up History

They aren't as ancient as dinosaur bones, but Brad Smith gets just as excited as a paleontologist when he digs out old steam engines that rolled across Midwest farms in the late 1800's and early 1900's. As co-owner of Smith Construction Services, a scrapyard/demolition business, in Scottsville, Kan., he knows most of his diggings won't net anything of real monetary value. For him it's about the dig and preserving pieces of history.

"My father, David, wanted to dig a steam engine out of a salt marsh 30 years ago. The state never would give permission to get it out, saying it was a landmark. They don't seem to care that it won't be there in another 30 years – just a pile of rust," Smith explains.

Smith, who owns an old Case steam engine with his Dad, would love to find an intact engine to restore. But he was thrilled to find a steering wheel wedged in the wheel of a front axle on a recent dig just 15 miles from his home.

Working with his 100,000-lb. excavator, axes, picks and shovels, he and his crew uncovered a tangle of parts from three steam engines rolled into a creek.

"I think it was before WWII, otherwise the scrap would have been sold," Smith says. He explains that after the steam engines lost their usefulness, it was common to cannibalize them of reusable or saleable parts and use the rest as landfill.

Smith is especially interested in the steel wheels – he has more than 1,500 wheels that he has salvaged off implements and equipment. Though he has about 15 old steam engine wheels salvaged from farms, they are hard to come by in Kansas because ranchers used to cut out the spokes and use the rims to make livestock watering tanks.

He was disappointed when he accidentally hit a cast wheel from a Rumley and ruined it with his excavator bucket during a recent dig. But later, after careful hand digging he discovered another wheel and the steering wheel from a second steam engine with a Nichols and Shepard brass tag on the cylinder. After uncovering parts from a third engine, the crew loaded more than 100,000 lbs. of cast iron (coated with dirt) onto Smith's lowboy trailer.

While much of it was only suitable for scrap, Smith powerwashed off wheels, axles and other parts and then chipped and hammered through the 1 1/2-in. barnacle-like crust encasing everything.

Published articles about his "dig" stirred up interest, and Smith says he has received calls about other potential places to dig. He's especially excited about rescuing steam engines that were lined up along a river as erosion control but then ended up buried when the river flooded in 1935. An intact steam engine was recently salvaged



He's especially interested in finding steel wheels and has salvaged more than 1,500.



After uncovering the parts, he and his crew load them onto a lowboy trailer.

nearby. Next spring, Smith plans to dig near an exposed wheel. He probed the area and located three steam engines.

Smith admits that owning excavators, cranes and other large equipment makes his digging hobby feasible. As a scrapyard owner, he pays the property owner salvage prices for parts he finds.

For other "diggers" he offers some advice. Check with local officials about necessary permits – especially when digging in waterways. Dig with heavy equipment far enough away to avoid damaging the "buried treasure" and to create a safe working area. Then use hand tools to expose the parts. Smith uses a foot-wide strap and his excavator to pull out the items.

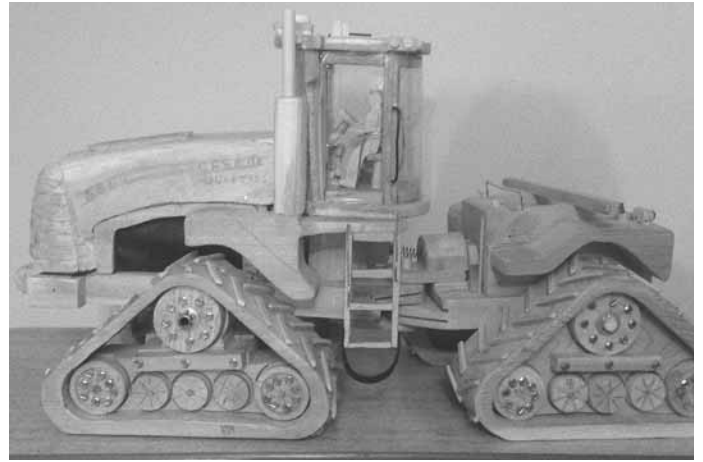
"It's a stress relief, and it's addictive," he admits, noting that even his young children wanted to help when he jackhammered concrete off a steam engine wheel.

"I feel like this needs to be preserved. They're kind of like trophies," he says. "I encourage other people to investigate when they hear stories about buried items or pass the information on to me. I'm interested in anything steam related no matter the condition."

Since digging up a few "bones" he's eager to unearth an entire "skeleton".

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**FARM SHOW**



Bernard Young's wood carvings include everything from tillage implements to modern 4-WD tractors, such as this Case IH Quadtrac.

## Amazingly Detailed Farm Machinery Carved To Scale

Bernard Young carves farm machinery so realistic-looking that you wouldn't be surprised if they started moving across the room. His carvings include a wide range of equipment from tillage equipment to modern 4-WD tractors. An 1870's combine pulled by 26 horses has wheels, pulleys and a sickle that moves.

"I started out with a block of wood and a carving knife given to me by one of my kids," recalls Young. "That was about 6 years ago, and I haven't stopped carving since then."

Young exhibited at the local county fair in 2013, winning Best of Show for his combine and 2 well drilling rigs. The rigs were fashioned after ones he had used in his 47-year well drilling career. They have derricks that lay flat on their trucks as if in transport, or they can be raised up into working position. He has also carved an old wagon and mules like those in the old Borax commercials, as well as a Wells Fargo stagecoach with a team of 6 horses.

Soon after the 2013 fair, Young began

planning his 2014 entries. One is a 4-WD Deere 9560R, complete with a metal field drag with 81 teeth. Another is a Case IH 600 Quadtrac. Both tractors have moving parts, including hoods that can be removed to reveal the engines.

Young studies the real thing or, in the case of antiques, pictures. He then selects a scale that works for him. The Deere tractor was 15 ft. wide so he made the model 15 in. wide.

Young has carved a number of older tractors. One of his favorites is an Iron Horse introduced in 1919. His carving is a perfect representation and includes a man walking behind it holding reins. Releasing or pulling on reins was how the tractor was controlled.

"I'll think of something or see it in a magazine," explains Young. "I'll sketch it up and start making it. I work mostly with pine and some cedar. I first rough it out and then do fine carving to finish."

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This Deere 9560R 4-WD tractor is complete with a field drag with 81 teeth. Both tractors have moving parts, including hoods that can be removed to reveal the engines.