From Log to Lathe

By Bill Grumbine

The subject here is a cherry log, approximately 14” in diameter, and 20” long. I am cutting it into two pieces for bowl blanks. Under normal circumstances, I would get two bowls from this log, but since I have a Kel McNaughton coring tool, I should be able to get at least four, and maybe even six if I want some itty bitty ones

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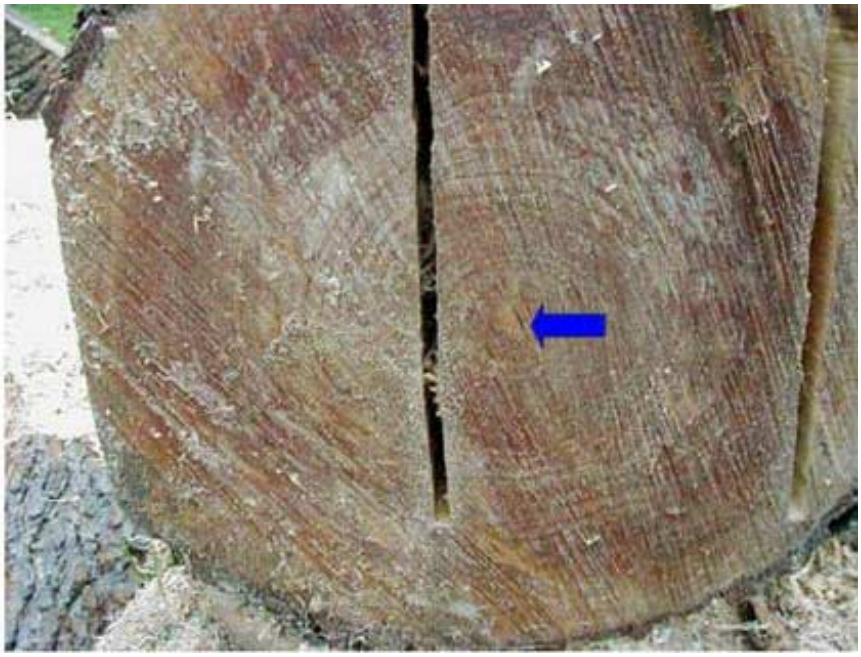
In this first picture, I am sawing it right down the middle to remove the pith. The log is propped on one side with a scrap to keep it from rolling around. I used to stand them on end, but with larger pieces, the wood cuts faster when it is on its side, and I don’t have to angle the saw as much. Cutting straight end grain is tough on the saw and tough on the operator. It also produces prodigious amounts of fine dust, as opposed to the long shavings seen here.

Notice that I have not yet completed the first cut, but have moved on to make a second. This keeps the log whole, and makes it a lot easier to make the rest of the cuts needed

In this next picture, I am making the same cut as in the previous picture, but on the other side of the log. Both of these cuts remove the rounded portion of the log, making for a flat blank, similar to a very short fat board. This makes life a lot easier and more accurate, not to mention safer, when it comes time to round the blank before putting it on the lathe.

Here is a closeup of the end of the log, with the first three cuts made. Notice the pith in the middle (crack next to arrow in Poolewood blue). No matter how straight you can saw, there is always the chance that the pith will remain through a section of the length. It is important to remove this if the blank is going to be stored for any length of time. It can be turned away if you are going to turn the bowl right away, but it still might be faster to saw it out.



Here I am making a second cut parallel to the first to bracket the pith and remove it from both halves. All of these cuts would be more difficult if the log had been halved on the first cut. As it is, I am having a relatively easy time of it.

Completing the previous cuts.

Here we see one half completely sawn. Even though the cross section has become very narrow, the log is still standing nicely for me. And, if it were to give me some grief, the remaining cuts are very small and quickly done.

The last cut is completed. I now have two bowl blanks, plus three slabs for the firewood pile.

Here is a closeup of one of the finished bowl blanks. At this point, I'll wax it and stack it for future use. When its time comes to be mounted on the lathe, it is a short and easy task to mark it out with a compass or a disk for diameter, and then saw it out on a band saw. On a 14" saw without a riser block, a bowl blank up to 6" inches can be sawn out. If you don't have a bandsaw with the needed capacity, or the log is too heavy to spin round the blade, draw the circle you want, and then lop off the corners with the chainsaw. If you are working close to the capacity of your lathe, you can make several tangential cuts to round it as much as possible.

This procedure is for a "maximum yield" bowl, cutting the log for the greatest volume and diameter. If a natural edged bowl is desired, most of this procedure is needless, while some parts of it become more difficult. I have some natural edged pieces waiting to be turned, so I'll save that for another day, but probably soon.