Hidden Bowl Within a Log

In this project I have documented how I make the "hidden bowl" within a log without using a vacuum chuck and only the crudest of jigs for your lathe. The interesting part of this is that the final object looks like a log that has been cut along the long axis. The unturned outside of the log is present, no tenon! In this example, the bark from the black walnut has been removed.

Begin by finding a log or branch of appropriate size. Here is a black walnut log of about 8 inches in diameter and approximately 10 inches long. It is on a band saw to be cut in half along the long axis through the pith.

This image below is the log cut in half and ready to be mounted on the lathe. Note that the pith was not in the center so the half logs are not of equal depth. The "jig" to hold the log for turning is nothing more than a circular piece of plywood mounted on a chuck with two blocks screwed along the side to help hold the log for turning. The log will be held in place with compression from the tail-stock.

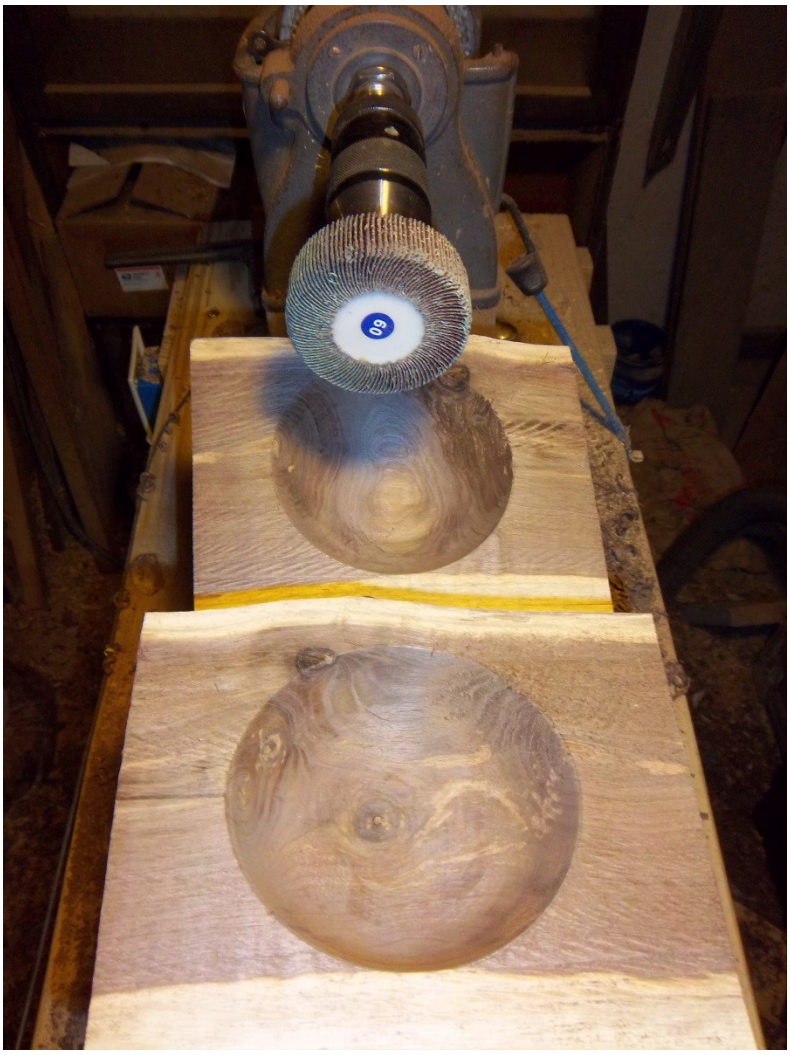
Here is where it gets interesting so be careful! Using rags and any stuffing you have, center and "square" the half-log to be turned on the lathe and hold the log in place with the tail-stock. This is what it looked like on my 1950's Delta lathe. I have drawn a circle on the log to let me know how big to make the "bowl" part of this object. I like to have both "bowls" the same size. Now carefully turn the head-stock by hand to see that your piece is square with the head-stock holding the piece. I use the tool-rest to gauge this. Next, turn on the lathe [face shield on, away from the path of the piece you will work on should it come free from your jig.] and stand back. If things look stable, you can begin to turn out the inside of the "bowl."

Another view of the log "pinned" into place and ready for turning.

Now the fun begins! Start turning out as much of the bowl as you can but leave a reasonable cone around the tail-stock for support. I have found it is better to leave more of a cone than less. This is so the cone does not split and your piece goes flying off the lathe. And getting rid of that cone is not that difficult as you will see. The image below shows the piece turned about as much as you can.

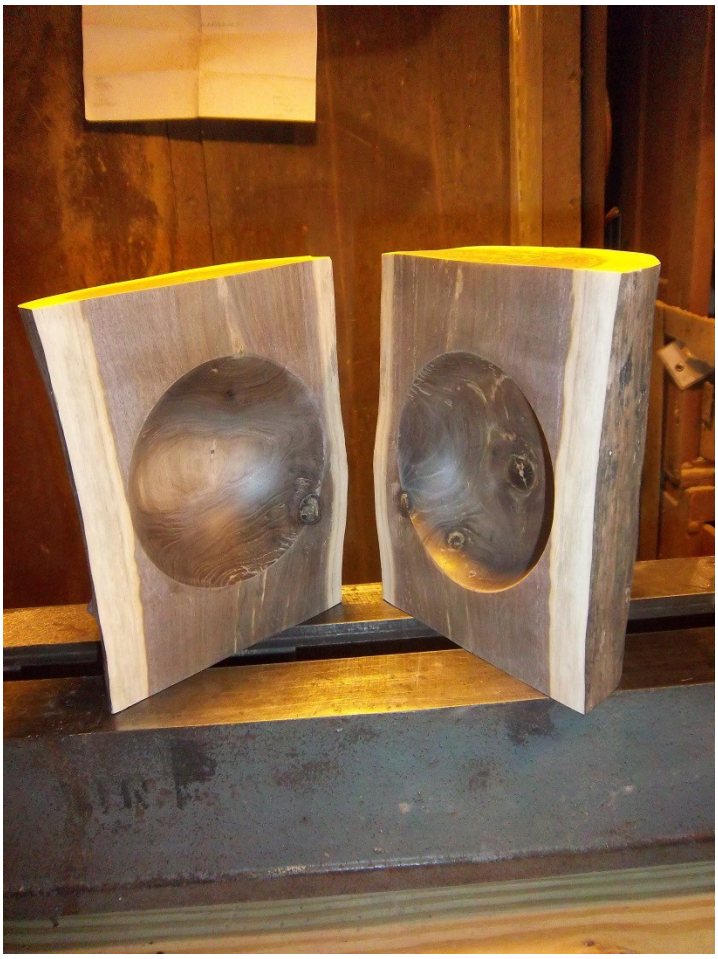
With a chisel remove the cone close to the bottom of the bowl taking care to not cut into the bottom. The image on the left show what the bowl looks like with the cone removed and the image to the right what the bowl looks like when it was removed from the lathe.

The image below shows both cones removed with the use of a chisel.



Using a sandpaper wheel [60 grit] on the head of the lathe held by a chuck, the bottom of the bowl can be cleaned up nicely. Again, be careful to maintain the curvature of the cut you put in with the gouge with the bowl was on the lathe. The sandpaper wheel [60 grit] on the head of the lathe is show below. The now cleaned out bowls are also shown.

Using sandpaper on a cushioned dish sander attached to the head-stock of the late with a chuck, the final sanding can be accomplished. The work goes surprising quickly. The faces and the ends can be cleaned up at this point as well.



The near-completed project is shown below ready for a finish with oil or wax. And this was all done safely without a vacuum chuck and most basic of jigs and tools [other than the band saw].