

The Swamp Sparta

by Leo Korb, 1810 Point of Rocks Road, Chester, VA 23831

In September 1992, at the Virginia State Fair, a fellow came by my engine display and told me about a big motor that had once run a mill that belonged to his uncle. In late October 1992, I decided to try to find the engine. I walked for two hours around a swamp, through briars and thick brush to get to the engine. When I finally found it, the sun was almost down, but the engine was a pretty sight. It was a big, 10 horsepower Sparta Economy! It was getting dark, so rather than trek two hours back around the swamp in unfamiliar woods, I waded back out through the swamp up to my waist.

The next April, I went back with a friend, Dwight Vivas, to get another look at the Sparta engine. I still hadn't decided whether to get the engine, or how I could remove it from where it was sitting on a little hill in the middle of the swamp. After this second look, though, I decided the engine was worth the effort. Now all we had to do was figure out how to get this much iron out of the swamp!!

The next trip in was to break the engine down so it could be moved across the swamp. Dwight and I took the cylinder and connecting rod off in one section, and the base and flywheels made another section. After removing the cylinder, we found the whole base was filled with honeycomb. It was old, and thankfully, it was also empty!

Now I had to put a crew together to execute the plan for retrieval of the Sparta! The crew members were Jim and Flynn Windle, Clyde Adams, Bud Holmes, Edward "Whit" Whitman, Dwight Vivas, David Frazier, Dave Ferguson, and myself.

Whit brought an old International Cub tractor, and I brought over 200 feet of steel cable, come-alongs, and snatch block. We met at about 8:00 a.m. on a hot morning in June 1993, to go get the big swamp Sparta.

The temperature was in the 90s and the humidity was about in the 90s, too!

We hiked about 1/2 mile through the brush down to the swamp, everybody carrying tools and helping to cut a path for the tractor. We strung the cable between two trees across the swamp on either side, and Clyde, Bud, Dave, and I waded across the swamp. We used the come-alongs to pull the engine

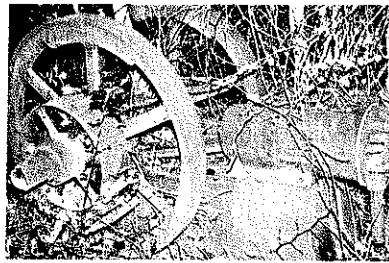
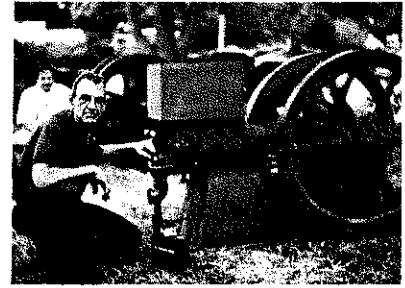
cylinder up to the cable, and hooked it to the snatch block. It pulled across hanging from the cable just fine. Then we went back for the base and the flywheels, which turned out to be a slight problem. We again had to pull the base up to the cable with the come-alongs. We hooked the base and flywheel section up to the cable and started it across. As we got to the opposite shore, the cable broke just short of the bank, dropping the engine in the swamp and losing the snatch block! Now we said a prayer,

and a few other choice words, and backed up the tractor as close to the bank as the brush would allow. We used the tractor and the come-alongs to pull the engine out of the swamp.

Once we got it out, we turned the engine and base upside down on its flywheels, so we could pull it behind the tractor like a trailer. We pulled the base up the hill, fighting the brush, mosquitoes, poison ivy, stifling heat, and the tractor all the way. Then, Whit went back for the cylinder while the rest of us gathered up the tools and loaded the engine on my pickup truck. Despite the heat, we managed to get the engine out and loaded in only four hours.

The same gentleman who first told me about the engine said he thought he could find the hopper, which was missing when I found the engine. I found the hopper later, a few miles down the road—it was being used as a flower pot!

Five weeks later the engine was running, and I invited all the crew members back to watch it go for the first time. The swamp Sparta went to its first show at Somerset, Virginia, in August, 1993, where it ran like new! I'm glad I decided to go ahead and get the engine, because there are only three of the 10 HP Spartas known to exist. ○



As found, April 1993.

