

## Abandoned Bee Hives (Part 1)

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Strange things happen to beekeepers. Almost anyone keeping bees has a story to tell. My story begins with an unexpected find that led to this story of recovering one hive of bees from an abandoned commercial bee yard.

After 24 years of living in close proximity to Columbus, Ohio I moved to rural central Ohio. As a new person moving into a community, I visited several of my neighbors to let them know I would be putting bees on my property.

One of my neighbors owns quite a bit of the land around my five acres. Once people know you keep bees, they usually have a lot of questions about bees in general. To my surprise, my neighbor informed me that he owned woods just a quarter of a mile north of my new home that had a commercial bee yard. However, no one was taking care of them and had not for at least ten years. He doubted there were any live hives there.

How does any red blooded beekeeper react to this opportunity?

I immediately asked permission to visit the woods. I did not expect to find much usable equipment but who knows. I did have a general location to look for the bee yard, but this was a big woods. It'd been cut for timber, and rutted trails ran in all directions.

**This was my first view of the bee yard.**



One might expect to see hives. But on a general walk through the woods, nothing really stood out until I spotted what looked like a hive body. The actual bee yard was covered in brambles. I could see some bee boxes but on first glance, I saw no standing hives. It was cold and I saw no bees flying.

**A closer look gave me more hope.**

At least I could see several hives in an upright position and yes, it was obvious that at one time this was a fairly good-sized bee yard.

The guys who cut the timber saw a good location for depositing their trash. Everywhere I looked were buried pallets—at least eight meaning there were most likely 30 plus hives in this location. Who these hives belonged to is still a mystery.



I did find one hive bees could possibly still occupy. Getting to the hive was a bit of a problem. These brambles had thorns and it would take some effort to check the hive. There was a light covering of snow on the ground and if I could pull the branch on the cover off, I might take a look.

As it turned out, the branch is what most likely made it possible for the bees in the hive survive. The top cover was missing half of the telescoping woodenware and the metal lid of the cover protected the inner cover below from the elements.







I macheted my way to the hive to determine if there were bees in it. I pulled off the top cover. Some critter had stored nuts in the upper shallow super and the area above the inner cover. But, I could hear bees! This hive still had a queen excluder above the brood nest and the winter cluster was below the excluder. Eventually a few bees came up to investigate.

At this stage in the game, I did not have permission to remove the hive but I was excited. Many questions needed to be answered. This hive had survived into February from the previous summer. How long they had bees occupied this hive? I had no idea. I was sure of one thing – I wanted this hive.

I was given permission to save the bees and move them to my property. I would need a trailer. In addition I would have to move a lot of trash trees and bee hive junk. I waited for the temperatures to get colder in order to get the hive out of the woods. The ground was firm; a hand truck made the move very easy. Later would come the day when this hive would have to be taken apart, inspected, and decisions made on its future. I was hoping that the bees in this hive and their queen exhibited some special characteristics that could be used to raise some survivor queens. After all, they made it this far without any help from humans.

These bees may have been a swarm that moved into this equipment, or they might have disease or like 50% of the managed hive they made it thru the winter, just like their managed cousins. Was there anything special about these bees? With Spring, we would soon be finding out!



Editor's Note: Watch next month for Part 2, covering transferring the bees and inspection the hive.