

off the fence.

Stories From The Vaults

14 x 30'

EPISODIC BREAKDOWN

1. Famous Donors

Tom takes us back to the origins of the Smithsonian's collections. He explores Teddy Roosevelt's hunting trophies, John Steinbeck's sea urchins, and Phyllis Diller's joke file. Add these to the roughly fifty thousand items donated annually, and you get a sense of the immense number of artefacts the Smithsonian holds in its museums.

2. Superlatives

Tom is on a mission: to discover what it means to be the best, the tiniest, the coldest, and the most misunderstood. He explores the art of taxidermy at the National Museum of Natural History, the music of a three-hundred-year-old Stradivarius at the National Museum of American History, and unique technology that scrunches the Bible onto one tiny microchip.

3. No Place Like Home

Tom tries to unravel the idea of Home Sweet Home. He visits the National Air and Space Museum's collection of space suits, learns about Native American tipis at the National Museum of the American Indian, and finds an astonishing array of life in a thimble of sand.

4. Beauty

Tom explores the many faces of beauty through the eyes of scientists. Three Smithsonian curators offer their surprising perspectives on the elusive meaning of true beauty as it applies to their work with advertising, orchids, and ants. Beauty isn't just in the eye of the beholder.

5. Firsts

Enter the vaults of the National Museum of American History and the National Air and Space Museum in search of earth-shattering firsts. From a new collection of vintage planes to the very first videogame (it wasn't Pong), Tom discovers what it takes to claim the title of Number One.

6. Life After Death

The Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery, the National Museum of Natural History, and the National Postal Museum all hold clues to the afterlife. Deep inside their vaults, the evidence for life after death has never been more convincing.

7. Random

Tom dives into the very heart of the world's largest museum complex amidst more than 136m objects. With such an incredible variety of things to see, any single artefact could seem out of place, but there's nothing haphazard about the systematic collections at the Smithsonian. Tom visits the National Zoo and the National Museum of American History, showing us that breadth certainly doesn't equal randomness.

8. Let's Eat!

Tom explores man's sincerest love of all – the love of food. First, he tries his hand at cooking Native American dishes with the executive chef of Mitsitam Café. He then visits the National Museum of American History to learn the origins of the American coffee break. Finally, he stops by the National Museum of Dentistry, where he learns how the food we adore has a less-than-loving relationship with our teeth.

9. Top Secret

Tom unlocks some of the Smithsonian's most compelling mysteries. Can an artist outsmart the world's top spies? How does a missile filled with mail make a political statement to the world? These questions – and many more – will be answered.

10. Nature's Vault

Tom goes natural at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama. Follow him as he tracks sloths, searches the Panama Canal for clues to the creation of the Panamanian Isthmus, and rises sixteen stories in a construction crane to research bug life atop the rainforest.

11. Crystal Ball

Tom taps into the Smithsonian's vaults and labs to gaze into the future, as we envisioned it in the 1930s and as we look forward today. First, Tom visits the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum to examine designers' visions of tomorrow via the 1939 World's Fair collection. Then, he heads to Panama to talk to scientists helping to preserve the future of the tropical rainforest.

12. Sex 101

Research into sexuality is kicking at the Smithsonian. Explore the love letters of Jackson Pollock and Frida Kahlo, stories about 'the birds and the bees, and laws of attraction between fiddler crabs.

13. Going, Going, Gone

Tom joins the Smithsonian on a mission of 'extreme conservation' to protect the best aspects of our world for future generations. See the amazing amount of work that goes into saving animals from the brink of extinction, preserving a provocative work of art, or reviving a genre of music.

14. Villains and Rogues

Tom takes on the bad guys and digs up some pretty incriminating evidence from the Smithsonian vaults. Tom's investigation unearths photographic evidence from the Crime of the Century, new details on America's first 'Lone Gunman': John Wilkes Booth, and creepy facts about everyone's favourite natural villain-the snake.