

Reel Usage

Since this year has had low visibility in Lake Erie, it might be useful to review why and how to use a reel. First, reels are not just for technical divers entering silty wrecks or cave divers exploring cave systems. They are also extremely useful for average open water divers. Foremost, they help you find your way back to the anchor line when the visibility gets bad. If you want to explore a wreck without getting lost and find your way back to the anchor line every time, then a reel is for you!

Sometimes a reel can save you a considerable amount of time and effort. If the boat's anchor misses the wreck altogether, you have two choices: (a) surface, remove your gear, and try hooking the wreck again or (b) swim away from the anchor and resign yourself to a free ascent and a lucky chance at finding the wreck. But with a reel you simply connect it to the anchor line and swim away. If you don't immediately find the wreck, then you simply lock your reel and sweep a circular arc until you bump into the wreck or snag it with your line and are drawn into it. And if the boat's anchor were to become unhooked and start drifting, you'd know about it and go with the boat.

Carrying a huge reel is not always necessary or even desirable. Some people see other divers carrying monstrous primary reels with 300'-500' of line on them and think "whoa, I don't want to have to always carry that thing around." A safety reel (typically 120'-160') is small, compact, and carries more than enough line for the average diver. If your buddy has a reel and you want to go farther, then connect the reels together and continue exploring. One danger of too much line is it takes longer to wind the line back up than to unwind it, so a smaller reel also makes sure you don't go too far for your allowable bottom time.

When purchasing a reel, look for ease of usage with gloves on and for strong line. Nylon diamond-braided line of #24 or larger size is good and will not easily break. After taking a reel home, immediately cut off about 15'-25' of line. You'll never be able to get the machine-wound length back on the reel again, and it'll just jam or foul. Some people attach a snap bolt at the end of the line, but it is possible for the reel's line to work its way out of a snap bolt's grasp. A better way is to make a large loop with a quick-link at the end of the loop. The reel can then be attached very securely by passing the reel around the anchor line and then passing it back through the loop. The quick-link at the end of the line acts like a weight to make the line more manageable in the water, to keep the end of the line from pulling up into the reel, and to give something for your fingers to grip at the end of the dive when undoing the loop.

Finally, proper reel usage makes for much more pleasant dives. The largest mistake most divers make is to simply unreel the line and let it float around loose in the water. Instead, it is best to quickly loop the line around a timber or spike

every 20'-30' to tie it down. It'll keep a constant tension on the line all along its length and allow for easier re-tracing of one's path. This will also prevent inadvertent tangling of the line on divers and/or wreck structure and make the line much easier to reel up at the end of the dive. Be warned: don't be too careful when wrapping up the line at the end of the dive. It's never a pretty job. After the dive, unreel the line at home and carefully re-wrap it so that it will be tangle-free on its next use. If you follow these guidelines, then you'll wonder why you ever dove the lake without a reel!