

On Wednesday, June 7, David VanZandt and Kevin Magee went to the eastern basin of Lake Erie to do some diving. As always, we went out on the "Southwind" with Jim Herbert of Osprey Dive Charter in Barcelona, NY, which is a 2 hour drive from Cleveland.

After not finding the originally intended wreck, we tried to find the "Swallow," but it, too, proved elusive. Several hours of searching showed no hits on the sounder. Thus, we settled on the "Oxford," also known as the "Tiller Wreck" or "Crows Nest" in 160' of water off the tip of Long Point. This wreck has an established mooring on her, so she was easy to find. The weather was bright and sunny, air temperature was cool at 55-60 deg F (great for suiting up in comfort), and a slight wind produced a 2' chop that made the boat, ladder, and mooring line move around a lot but otherwise made for pleasant dive conditions.

Viz on the surface looked pretty bad. As we descended we were expecting the 30' viz and pitch black conditions like those encountered on the "Atlantic" on Sunday. However, at 100', the murk and darkness suddenly cleared, and you could see the whole wreck beneath you. The wreck is - for the most part - in beautiful condition and upright on the bottom. The mooring line ties to her stern on the port side, and the stern lies completely out of the mud, exposing her entire rudder and showing the beautiful curved lines of her hull. It is really an impressive, beautiful sight. The prominent tiller - completely intact and ready to steer - is on the aft deck, and the cabin opening is immediately forward of that. The cabin is gone, but it makes an excellent entry point to swim through her interior.

Working forward along the length of her deck, she slopes downward into a huge crater, and the bow is completely broken up. She was carrying a cargo of iron ore, and she must have struck the bottom nose first hard when sinking. The lake bottom is at about 155', but the crater depth is about 10'-15' below that. About half the length of the ship is intact, then it breaks up as it enters the crater. The deck railing on the rear part of the ship is completely intact and has deadeyes and belay pins still in place. The ship appears to have been a two-masted schooner, and the aft mast is broken off about 5' above the deck. On the deck are the ship's hand pump, rigging winch, cargo hatches, and various debris. As one enters the crater, the forward mast is lying off to the port side diagonally resting on a yardarm or cross member. There are a lot of structural tie-in points at the center of this structure, all forming what looks like a crows nest. It is a unique feature not seen on other wrecks and is another highlight of this wreck. The mast continues outward and upward from the "crows nest" for another 25' or so before breaking off. Various parts of the mast also lie about this area.

We circled the wreck, then entered at the cabin opening and swam down the length of her cargo holds. Exits and entrances can be done at various points along her length through the cargo hatches or where the bow breaks up. A prominent centerboard is obvious when swimming inside her, and it separates

the port and starboard sides of her hold. The port side continues farther than the starboard side and exits at the bottom of the crater.

Maximum depth was 163', bottom time was 20 minutes, and total run time was 45 minutes, although we spent an extra 5 minutes at the 15' stop for a total run time of 50 minutes. Viz on the bottom was very good at about 80', which is the best we've had so far this year. The bottom temperature was 41-42 deg F. There was a sudden reduction in viz at a depths above 100' and possibly a slight temperature increase. The temperature at 45' was 46-47 deg. F with just a hint of a thermocline forming, and the temperature at 15' was 53 deg F, so the lake is warming up quite a bit from several weeks ago.