

On Saturday, August 25, David VanZandt and Kevin Magee went out diving on Dave's boat "Sea Dragon." Cindy LaRosa had work commitments and could not make it. The skies were clear and the seas were calm at 1'-2' despite the bad weather forecasted, making for a pleasant day on the lake. The wreck visited was the "Sand Merchant," a steel sandsucker that foundered and sank in 54' of water off Avon Point in 1936 while traveling between Pelee Point and Cleveland. Dave and Kevin were joined after anchoring into the wreck by Dave's friend Lori Wagner, who arrived in his boat "Perlandera." Dave and Lori made a quick dive while Kevin watched the boats. They surfaced to report the anchor was off the wreck and despite the promising surface viz, the bottom viz was very bad. Lori had to leave, so afterwards Dave and Kevin suited back up and went in for a closer look.

A reel was tied off the anchor line at the thermocline, where the viz was still good, and the wreck was quickly found by swimming back in the direction of the boat. The wreck is upside down, so only the ship's bottom is visible. Amidships it has vertical sides and a very flat bottom, much like a barge. The keel is at a depth of 40', and viz was good at about 10'. The wreck is heavily covered in zebra mussels, and many, many gobies were seen on top of the wreck. Some schools of perch were also seen. Swimming towards the stern, which is southeast, the ship's bottom forms a more traditional "V" shape. At the extreme end can be found the intact propeller and rudder. The large four-bladed propeller is in a slot between the hull and the rudder, and the rudder can be seen turned hard to port. Swimming towards the bow, it was found to also curve gracefully and then drop vertically towards the bottom.

The bottom of the ship is featureless except for four vertical shafts found leading into the interior of the ship. Their original purpose is unknown, but it may have been to allow sand to be dumped out of the bottom of the ship. The first set of two shafts are about midships and measure approximately 2'x3'. They go down into the ship by about 10' before disappearing into an opening. The second, smaller set of two shafts is near the stern and measure approximately 1'x2'. One is clogged with silt, but the other was seen to go down about 8' and disappear into a cavity beyond it.

Exploring the sides of the ship, it was found that below the thermocline at 47', viz went to 1'-2'. Feeling down the sides of the ship, it was discovered that the gunwales are buried far below the lake bottom in a narrow trench about 2'-4' wide that goes down about 6'-8' below the lake bottom. Depths of 62' were reached exploring this trench, but it was found to be unstable with silt raining down and no openings under the gunwales found. Two dives were eventually made on the wreck, including a twilight dive, before ending the day. This wreck apparently also has a large debris field that would be nice to explore on a day when the bottom viz is better.