

CLUE, 2005-06-05 - "Dundee" Report

On Sunday, June 5, 2005, Carrie Sowden met David VanZandt and Kevin Magee at Dave's boat "Sea Dragon" moored in Cleveland, OH. Carrie is the Archaeological Director for the Peachman Lake Erie Shipwreck Research Center (PLESRC), which is part of the Great Lakes Historical Society in Vermilion, OH. PLESRC serves as the headquarters for MAST (Maritime Archaeological Survey Team, Inc.), an avocational group dedicated to the documentation of Ohio's underwater historic resources. This summer MAST plans to survey the wreck of the "Dundee," a large 210' long three-masted wooden schooner/barge that sank in 68' of water 14 miles off Rocky River after foundering with the loss of one life in a September storm in 1900. It is a popular dive site, very intact, and considered one of the best wrecks off Cleveland. The purpose of the trip was to obtain high-detail side scan pictures of the "Dundee" and perform exploratory dives to familiarize Carrie with the site. CLUE offered its services in side scanning in the same manner it had during last year's MAST survey of the "Craftsman" barge and crane.

Despite the marine forecast calling for the possibility of violent thunderstorms, the lake was almost flat with less than 1' seas, no appreciable wind, and a bright, sunny sky. After arriving at the site and spending an hour scanning it, many detailed images of the "Dundee" were obtained that will be useful in planning the survey. In fact, the images are detailed enough to create an initial site map before a single measurement is taken. The water appeared a nice blue color, a good omen for clear visibility. Approximately 10'-15' of visibility was encountered on the surface, and upon descending it was found that bright ambient light penetrated all the way to the bottom. However, the visibility decreased to about 5'-8' on the bottom. While not the best visibility ever seen on this wreck, the bright lighting made it perfectly acceptable for seeing and navigating this extensive wreck. The bottom temperature was 47-48 deg F with a weak thermocline starting at 30' and 57 deg F water on the surface.

Zebra mussels barely coat the wreck in some places and moderately cover it in others. Bare wood was visible in many places, and all the deck equipment could easily be identified with only a light coating of mussels evident. This large wooden schooner has its collapsed bow to the west. The bow stem is standing with a long hawse pipe lying on the starboard side. A large anchor chain hangs off the bow, runs through the hawse pipe, and then runs to the windlass and wraps around it. The windlass has fallen into the rubble with a diagonal tilt to the port side. Immediately behind it is a donkey boiler offset to the port side. The collapsed decking of the bow has fallen to the bottom of the wreck but is fairly intact, and the outline of a cargo hatch can be seen in this area. Both sides of the hull still stand at the bow, although the port side is broken down somewhat. The starboard side, however, gracefully curves in towards the stem.

Aft of the bow, the majority of the hull is intact with the sides, deck, and railings all standing. Some of the deck planking is missing, especially along the starboard side. At various points along the railings can be found three sets of large turnbuckles used to support the standing rigging of the masts. The "Dundee" was built towards the end of the schooner era and did not use deadeyes. Visibility was good enough to see the lake bottom from the deck, which is about 6' off the bottom. Occasional scattered boards were seen in the debris field next to the hull. Along the ship's length are six large cargo hatch openings almost the full width of the ship. Combined with the hatch opening at the bow, there are seven cargo hatches total. Starting at the centerline and moving aft, a mast hole and part of its collar is first found. The decking is fairly broken in this area, exposing the beams and framing under the deck. This is followed by two cargo hatch openings, then a large square bit. Another hatch opening and then another mast hole and its collar follow this. After yet another cargo opening, a large winch and two cleats can be found. After the next hatch opening, the broken mizzen mast can be seen standing 5' off the deck with a circular fife rail attached to the mast. Finally, after the last cargo hold opening, another square bit can be seen standing with one hand pump deck penetration aft of it. The other penetration and the hand pump itself are missing. It should be noted that Dave saw a circular hole in the side of the ship in this area on the starboard side, and this may be the discharge for the hand pump.

At this location the decking ends, broken by the cavity where the cabin used to be located but is now missing, probably blown off by the sinking. Wooden debris fills this cavity, but the horizontal framing for the cabin floor can be seen. Standing upright among the debris on the starboard side can be found a small vertical pipe, possibly from the cabin stove. The hull is standing on both sides of the cavity but is damaged somewhat on the starboard side at the extreme stern. The rudder post is standing in the middle with the wooden steering quadrant attached to it. The undersides of the hull can be seen coming up to meet the transom, but the transom itself is missing and probably part of the wooden debris lying outside the wreck behind the rudder and starboard side. The top of the rudder itself can be glimpsed by peeking under the hull at the base of the rudder post. Wrapped around the top of the rudder post is a yellow plastic line holder. Its line runs across the cabin cavity and eventually ties to the winch. There is also a white plastic jug and mooring line attached to the winch and wrapped around the starboard side. Both of these items and their lines should probably be removed to avoid entanglement before the upcoming survey.

After the first dive, the lake was mirror flat with barely a ripple to disturb the lake for miles around. The anchor line stayed limp throughout the day since there were no winds or currents. It was bright and sunny, and the air temperature was hot at 70-75 deg F. Lunch was started after surfacing from the first dive, and then a second dive was done. Finally, it was a pleasant drive back to Cleveland on an absolutely flat lake until about 5 miles offshore when 1'-2' waves picked up due to land wind effects. Overall, it was a very enjoyable and successful day.

For anyone interested in helping survey this wreck, they are encouraged to contact Carrie Sowden at 440-967-3467 (ext. 6) or shipwreck@inlandseas.org. The "Dundee" is a magnificent wreck and deserves the attention of MAST to preserve and protect its history.

About CLUE

Cleveland Underwater Explorers (CLUE) was founded by David VanZandt and Kevin Magee in 2003. The team added Chief Researcher Jim Paskert in May, 2004. Our purpose is to research, locate, and explore the shipwrecks of the Great Lakes with an emphasis on Lake Erie. The team consists of individuals experienced in archival research, Great Lakes history and ship construction, underwater survey techniques and equipment, mechanical and electrical engineering, and recreational and technical scuba diving. The team is dedicated to finding, exploring, and documenting the submerged history found on the bottom of the Great Lakes.