

On Sunday, September 9, 2007, fourteen divers, including Cindy LaRosa and Kevin Magee, showed up at Barcelona, NY, to go diving in Lake Erie on Osprey Charter's boat "Southwind." The day was gray, overcast, and rainy, but the lake was flat with less than 1' waves. The day was also hot and humid, and the air was 80 deg F. The trip was planned to the "Sterncastle," a rarely visited unknown sailing vessel in 185' of water off the tip of Long Point. Once underway and out in the middle of the lake, however, the waves built to 2'-3' seas with whitecaps. Frequent rain showers were also present, cutting visibility to less than a mile. Once at the site, several attempts were made to grapple the low-lying and partly buried wreck, but it proved to be in vain due to the rough conditions.

Therefore, the decision was made to go instead to the "St. James," originally known as "Schooner X." This wreck was further away but in the shelter of Long Point from the northeast breeze. Upon reaching the site, 1' seas, clear surface water, and an intact mooring were discovered, making this wreck a good choice. The "St. James" is a two-masted schooner that sank in 160' of water in October, 1870, under unknown circumstances. She was carrying wheat from Toledo to Oswego, but her crew of seven and the ship were never seen again. The yawl boat is missing, and there are no signs of damage, so the ship either foundered in a storm or sprang a leak. Given the very intact nature of the wreck, it is speculated she sprang a leak and slowly sank to the bottom. It is unknown why the crew was never rescued or found in the yawl boat. The wreck was eventually identified when its tonnage numbers were found on the forward hatch coaming. The wreck is considered one of the best and most preserved wrecks in Lake Erie.

Upon entering the water, visibility on the surface was discovered to be good at about 10', and the surface water temperature was a warm 75 deg F. Upon descending, the thermocline was found at 60'-65', but it also extended down to almost 90', where a cold 40-degree bottom temperature was found. Also at 80'-90', the foremast of the ship and the crosstrees could be seen standing next to the mooring line. Conditions on the bottom were very dark, requiring a strong light, but the visibility was superb and crystal clear to the limits of one's light. As one descended past the mast, the lights of divers on the deck 60'-70' below could be seen lighting up portions of the wreck like fireflies. The mooring was tied to the starboard anchor, and the bow points north. The ship lies on an even keel on the bottom with the hull, deck, and railings completely intact. She stands 10' off the bottom at the bow and stern, but the bottom comes to within a few feet of her gunwales amidships due to the drifting action of the silt. The deck is also covered in several feet of thick silt and is at about 150' depth.

Two classic wood-stocked anchors are present on the bow. The starboard anchor is hanging on the cathead over the side of the ship with chain still holding the anchor to the cathead. The port anchor is also mounted on its cathead but is hefted up over the railing with the flukes resting on the deck. The catheads are

of the short 90-degree style mounted to the railings. In the center of the bow deck is a large windlass with a small covered companionway that leads below deck. Peering inside reveals a chain locker room that is mostly filled with silt. Chain is still wrapped around the windlass spool, and a pawl bitt is in front of the windlass. On the forward side of the bitt is a pivoting rocker arm mechanism that is connected by two rods, one on each side of the bitt, to large metal collars on the windlass spool near the pawl. This was the mechanism by which the windlass was slowly ratcheted to raise the anchors. The bowsprit is intact, but the jib boom is broken off. Underneath the bowsprit can be seen one of the highlights of the wreck, a decorative scrollhead built in the old "chin" style. Bobstay chains run from the stem to various points along the bowsprit. A burbot fish was found resting in the bowsprit staring out at divers, and several others were seen hiding in the railing and at the stern.

Moving aft along the deck, the fully standing foremast has a square fife rail around it with belaying pins in place. Four deadeyes can be seen on both railings opposite of the mast. Immediately behind the mast is a small winch flush against the mast. Aft of this is an older style double-barreled wooden pump with the handles missing but the decorative housing intact. The first cargo hatch is aft of the pump with its hatch cover partially caved in. Amidships is a capstan with a cylindrical style head, followed by another cargo hatch with another partially collapsed hatch cover. Behind the hatch is a square bitt for tying off the foremast's boom. The centerboard winch is aft of the bitt, and then the fallen mainmast can be seen lying off towards the stern on the port side. The mainmast used to be standing in the 1990's, but it slowly started to fall down in 2001 until it finally lay on the bottom after a couple of years. It has almost completely destroyed the square fife rail around it, but mast hoops can be seen stacked at the base of the fallen mast. Four deadeyes can be seen on both railings. Behind the fallen mast is a double-barreled metal pump upended from the heaved deck, followed by a third and final cargo opening.

At the stern is the cabin with damage and a collapsed companionway on the forward port side. It is possible to look into the cabin, which is almost completely filled with silt, through missing boards along the cabin's sides. Another companionway exists at the stern on the starboard side, and a large two-sheave block rests on the roof of the cabin near this companionway. Another block can be seen against the railing on the forward port side. Behind the cabin is the ship's wheel, which is half buried in several feet of silt in the middle of the large steering deck. Four spokes/handles of the wheel are visible. The stern of the ship is squared off, and the transom is completely exposed down to the rudder, which is turned towards starboard. The underside shape of the hull can be seen as well. The transom is plain with no decorations, and the port davit for the yawl boat can be seen sticking straight back from the corner of the transom. The starboard one is missing.

Several booms and gaffs can be seen lying around the wreck. The mainmast boom lies diagonally off the stern on the starboard side along its gaff lying on the starboard deck nearby. Another spar, possibly the foremast gaff, has fallen across the bow on the port side. The foremast boom appears to be lying flush up against the port railing amidships. The placement of the masts' spars seems to indicate the ship was rigged for sailing when it sank. One curious feature that could not be identified is what appears to be a vertical sign post-like object attached to the port railing next to the foremast.

While ascending, one of the deep stops was at the same level as the top of the mast, allowing it to be examined in detail. The crosstrees are a plain style, and the topmast is attached but broken off after the steps. There are old lines and/or the remains of netting on the topmast, and some of it hangs down the mast below the crosstrees. At least one piece may be the remains of wire rigging, but this was not investigated. The decompression at 20' was tricky despite the nice conditions. It was hard to maintain position for some reason with divers constantly maneuvering and crashing into each other. Upon reaching the dive platform at the stern of the "Southwind," it became obvious the boat was swinging back and forth on the mooring, making maintaining a steady position near the line difficult since the line kept moving into the hovering divers. Bottom time was 20 minutes, total run time was 55 minutes, 20/35 trimix with 50% and 100% oxygen were used, and max depth was 156'.