

CLUE, 2007-09-30 – Buried Schooner

On Sunday, September 30, 2007, David VanZandt and Kevin Magee dove a new shipwreck discovered while searching the week previously on September 23, 2007. The wreck is located about 20-25 miles off Cleveland. It was not dove at the time of discovery due to the late hour of the day and rough 3- to 4-foot sea conditions. The sidescan sonar image was not clearly defined as a shipwreck due to the lack of a vertical profile and incomplete shape, but it was suspected to be a deeply buried sailing vessel with the bow and its port side visible in 70 feet of water. The trip to the site started in flat seas with a south wind, but conditions soon changed to 3-foot seas as the distance from shore increased. The day was warm at 70 degrees F, and the skies were clear and sunny. Upon reaching the site, great difficulty was experienced in anchoring into the wreck due to no vertical relief of the target. A good anchor hold was finally obtained within 20 to 40 feet of the target, and the weather began to calm to 2-foot seas or less.

Surface conditions were good with 5 to 8 feet of visibility, bright ambient light, and a 68-degree F water temperature. These conditions remained until within 5 feet of the bottom when the thermocline was found and the temperature dropped abruptly to 56 degrees F. Below the thermocline the visibility was only 2 feet with very dark conditions. The anchor was not on any wreckage, so a reel line was attached, and a search for the wreck was started. After about 5 minutes, a 2-foot deep narrow trench was found with a wood railing and attached single deadeye visible at the bottom. To the south the railing disappeared into a mud wall. The railing was followed to the north, and a metal eyelet was quickly seen on the railing near the deadeye. After swimming a while longer, two more deadeyes were found attached to the railing, and some holes were seen in the railing that could be belaying pin holes.

The railing then curves quickly to the east to form a blunt bow. The exposed railing is the port side. Upon rounding the bow, the starboard railing quickly disappears into another mud bank about 2 feet below the lake bottom. On the starboard side, a small 90-degree (bent) style of cathead with a single pulley wheel can be seen mounted to the railing. There is an identical cathead on the port side, but it is pushed upwards as if it was damaged, and the pulley wheel is not obvious. There are also two line chock slots cut into the bow's railing, one on each side near the stem. At the very tip of the bow is a simple round bowsprit that runs under the railing and horizontally to the north with an east component. It continues for about 10 feet in a narrow trench that is about 2 to 3 feet below the lake bottom before it runs into another silt wall. The silt was very soft and covered with a flaky alga that was easily dislodged, reducing visibility even more. No zebra mussels were seen anywhere on the wreck, suggesting possible anaerobic conditions on the bottom.

Returning to the bow, the bowsprit continues under the railing and terminates in either a broken end or a strange clevis joint. Immediately aft is a simple windlass with the center barrel, pawl rim, both Carrick bitts, and both outside spool ends visible. Anchor chain is wrapped around the barrel on the starboard side and travels forward to a hawse hole that can be felt under the silt. Strangely, no pawl bitt was seen. Some paper debris was found under the windlass barrel, and a tree branch and paper debris were found under the base of the bowsprit.

Based on these observations, it would appear the wreck is a small two-masted schooner. However, due to the highly buried nature of the wreck, its cargo, dimensions, and other characteristics could not be determined. This wreck is probably almost gone and may not be visible too much longer. Maximum depth was 75 feet, and the dive time was 35 minutes.