

On Sunday morning, June 14, 2009, Cindy LaRosa and Kevin Magee made the 2.5-hour drive from Cleveland, OH, to Barcelona, NY, to dive in the afternoon aboard Osprey Charter's "Southwind." Also aboard were Jimmy Herbert, Wayne Rush, James Moseley, John Gavroy, Jim Tate, and Claudia. The day was clear and sunny at 70-75 deg F, and the seas were calm at 1'. The target was the tug "Smith," a 120-foot long wooden tugboat that was built in 1881 and sank on Saturday, October 25, 1930, while under tow upbound from Port Colborne to Sarnia, Ontario, for repairs by its new owners. At 2:00 in the morning in rough seas the 49-year old ship foundered off the tip of Long Point in Lake Erie, requiring the towing vessel to rescue the "Smith's" four crewmen.

The trip to the wreck was uneventful, and in less than an hour we were at the dive site. Rush and James hooked the wreck, and then everyone else entered the water. Jimmy Herbert was the last to enter the water and unhooked the mooring at the end of his dive. Surface visibility was good at 15'-20' with a surface temperature of 58-60 deg F. No thermocline was noticeable, but the bottom temperature was 40-41 deg F with an excellent 80'-100' of visibility and bright ambient lighting conditions. The wreck lies in 160' of water, but it could be seen starting at a depth of about 100'. The mooring was attached to the bow, which points east. The bow stands very high off the bottom by about 15', and it slopes downwards towards the lake bottom as one travels towards the stern. The wreck also has a slight list to port. At the bow is a small windlass with drive gears on the starboard side. Some anchor chain is wrapped around the port side of the windlass and runs straight to the port hawse pipe, which has a small mushroom anchor in it. The anchor is pulled tight against the bulkhead, and the head of the anchor at first appears to be a bumper near the stem. Behind the windlass is a standing ventilator (air scoop), and behind this is a rectangular companionway with stairs on the starboard side leading down below deck. Peering into this companionway, the area below can be seen to be a large room with a 5'-8' high overhead, although entry would be difficult. Peering over the starboard side, the bow of the vessel can be seen to be covered in metal plates, some of which are peeled back at the corners or edges. These plates gave the tug the ability to operate in ice and must have been damaged during the sinking.

Moving aft, the tug's superstructure is partially collapsed in a pile of boards slid to the port side. However, the wheelhouse is still intact and is standing on top of the wreckage. It is partially filled with silt, but the ship's wheel can be seen half-exposed with a chadburn on the starboard side. The roof of the wheelhouse is intact, and carved wooden gutters can be seen around the edges of the roof. The sides of the wheelhouse are also intact, and a doorway is on the port side but mostly blocked by silt. Behind the wheelhouse lies the ship's fallen smokestack perpendicular across the wreck to the port side. Mounted firmly to the forward side of the smokestack is a large steam whistle. Behind the smokestack at the center of the wreck are the remains of the engine house.

The house has been reduced to its framework with the sides and roof missing, allowing easy viewing of the equipment. A compound engine occupies the rear of the vessel before the aft deck begins, and examination from the sides allows the cranks and drive shaft below the engine to be seen. A lone lifeboat davit hangs off the port rear corner of the engine house.

On the aft deck next to engine house are two large bits side-by-side with a deck winch to the starboard side. Various small openings can be found on the aft deck, but they are almost completely filled with silt. Flush with the deck at the extreme stern is a very large Y-shaped gear that fills the width of the ship. It is turned towards the starboard side and was probably a tensioning or guiding device for the tow line. The stern is rounded and very close to the bottom. Close examination of the transom reveals the white-painted name and port of the ship ("Smith, Montreal"), which has been made visible by divers using their fingers to keep the letters clear of zebra/quaga mussels. Having the original name of the ship visible is extremely rare in Lake Erie and is an interesting sight to see.

Also seen on the wreck were three burbot, also called ling cod or lawyer fish. One of them, who was found hiding under the boards of the collapsed deckhouse, had an enormously face (8"-12" wide), and the fish itself appeared to be about 4'-5' long from what could be seen under the boards. This added to the allure of this beautiful shipwreck. It should be noted that during the dive one diver did have some problems with bad-tasting, possibly contaminated, deco gas that was filled in a Florida dive shop. Fortunately, the situation was corrected by sharing gas with the dive buddy during decompression. Bottom time was 20 minutes, run time was 51 minutes, max depth was 155', and 22/30 with 50% deco gas was used.