

A momentous occasion occurred on Sunday afternoon, July 19, 2009, when Kevin Magee finally got to dive the wooden steamer "Swallow." Kevin had tried for five+ years to dive this wreck, but weather, lack of divers, work obligations, and other issues always foiled his efforts. Finally, the planets and other astronomical bodies all aligned, and six other divers joined him in eastern Lake Erie aboard Osprey Charter's boat "Southwind." They included Jack Papes, Wayne Rush, James Moseley, John Gavroy, Pat Wolfe, and Mike Bluth. The weather had been bad all weekend, but on Sunday things began to calm down, and the seas were a bumpy but tolerable 3'. The weather was cool and pleasant at 70 deg F when the boat left the dock to make the long trip across the lake. After reaching the wreck, Long Point and its lighthouse could clearly be seen to the west, indicating we were off its tip. Wayne and James suited up to attach a mooring, and then everyone else followed after some delay.

The "Swallow" is a relatively small 134'x26' wooden steamer that carried lumber as its primary cargo and was part of a class of vessels referred to as "lumber hookers." These ships had deckhouses fore and aft with a sunken cargo deck in the middle that was typically stacked with lumber to incredible heights as tall as the deckhouses. On October, 1901, this 28-year old ship was travelling with a cargo of lumber and shingles while also towing a barge loaded with lumber from Lake Superior to Buffalo, NY. The vessels encountered a late-season gale as they approached Long Point, and the "Swallow" began leaking. Unable to keep up with the incoming water, the crew of eleven abandoned the vessel, retreated to the barge, and cut the tow line. The "Swallow" was never seen again. The barge, however, was tossed mercilessly for 39 hours adrift in the storm with double the normal complement of people aboard. It lost its deck load of lumber and also began to leak badly before it was finally found by a passing steamer and towed to safety at Erie, PA.

The water conditions were superb upon descending to the wreck. The surface water was warm at 70 deg F with a good 15' of visibility. A thermocline was encountered at 40' with 40 deg F water below it and very clear 50'-70' visibility. On the way down, a mess of multiple mooring ropes was discovered suspended at 90'-120', requiring some careful navigation through them. The mooring was attached to the rudderpost, which sticks 2'-3' out of the top of the raised stern deck. Lying right next to it is an unidentified metal box measuring several feet square, and a small capstan stands nearby. The railing is intact around the starboard side of the rounded fantail but missing on the port side. The sides are intact around the entire vessel and drop an additional 15'-20' to the bottom from the bow and stern, providing much relief above the 180'-deep bottom. The stern points west, and the underside of the ship is buried, hiding the propeller and allowing only the very top of the rudder to be visible. The deckhouse is collapsed, but its side walls, complete with window openings and shutters, can be seen lying on the stern deck. Lying straight down the middle of this deck is the smokestack fallen to the stern. It has pipes and other machinery parts mounted to it. A spring-like device points up at its base, and the top of an engine

cylinder can be seen below deck in the same location. However, the deck is collapsing down the middle and is heavily silted and littered with wooden debris, hiding any full views of the engine, boiler, or machinery spaces below. This collapse down the middle of the deck also makes penetration under it uninviting. On the port side near the fantail some stairs can be seen leading down below deck before becoming silted. There is also the top of a half-opened door sticking out of the silt behind the stairs.

Amidships is the cargo deck, which stands 10' high off the bottom and has ample space for penetration inside. Peering into the three cargo hatches, at least 8'-10' of clearance was obvious with centerposts running down the middle of the hold. No obvious signs of cargo were seen inside. Upon reaching the bow, the foremast can be seen standing vertically far above the wreck. Around the mast's base are cleats, and a net hangs from the very top of the mast. The top deck is collapsing in the middle in a very similar manner as the stern deck, but penetration appears to be somewhat possible along the sides, although the insides can be viewed by simply swimming alongside the wreck. The interior is heavily silted. The pilothouse is completely missing on top, but a fallen pump lies on the deck on the port side. At the very bow, the pointing pole is attached to the stem and is pivoted on its yoke 180 degrees backwards to rest on a square bitt and another small capstan. The starboard anchor is missing, but the port anchor is stowed in the lower deck with its metal stock sticking vertically out the bow. One fluke is visible inside, but no windlass could be seen inside the heavily silted interior. A net also hangs off the stem.

On the way back up at the first decompression stop at 120', the whole stern half of the wreck could be seen below. Lighting was dim but bright enough to see without a light once one's eyes adjusted. Upon surfacing, the seas had calmed to 2' or less, making for a comfortable ride back to shore. Kevin was very happy to dive this excellent wreck and can't wait to dive it again soon, hopefully in less than five years. Used for the dive were 20/35 trimix, 50% nitrox, and 100% oxygen with a 20 minute bottom time and 56 minute run time.

Photos of the dive and wreck can be seen on Jack Pape's web site.

[http://www.n2junkie.com/gallery/flash/lake\\_erie\\_flash\\_pages/swallow\\_071909/](http://www.n2junkie.com/gallery/flash/lake_erie_flash_pages/swallow_071909/)