

It was a gray overcast day on Saturday, August 21, 2010, when Scott Harrison, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee met at the Black River in Lorain, OH, to go diving in Lake Erie. Despite a strong south wind and predictions of rain, the lake's near-shore waters appeared calm, so they decided to take a chance and test the waters. As they loaded Scott's boat "Wreck-Reation," Gary Humel motored past on his boat "Nobody" with Monica Dobies aboard. They were also headed out to go diving, and arrangements were made to meet at the first wreck. Entering the lake a while later, the calm seas grew to a choppy 1'-2' as the distance from shore increased by a mile or two, reinforcing the decision to stay close to shore this day. They traveled east down the coast approximately 10 miles to Avon Point, where Gary was waiting on the MAST mooring of "The Craftsman." He was surrounded by a fleet of small fishing boats, and one of them near the mooring obviously had his anchor snagged on something below, probably the crane.

This wreck lies in 40' of water on a rock bottom and is a 90' x 28' metal work barge that foundered with no loss of life in a storm in June, 1958, while being towed between Huron, OH, and Cleveland, OH. Its crane, which was mounted on the barge, now rests a hundred feet off the wreck to the east. Gary and Monica entered the water first, and Gary soon freed the fisherman's anchor, which was snagged on the end of the crane's boom. Upon entering the water, Scott, Cindy, and Kevin discovered a nice 5'-8' of visibility and bright ambient conditions. However, upon descending past the thermocline at 35', the conditions abruptly changed from 77 deg F to 65-68 deg F and only 2'-3' of visibility with dark conditions where a light was needed to see anything. Upon reaching the concrete mooring block off the northeast end of the barge, the barge could not be seen even though it was only 5'-10' away. It was decided to swim along the bottom to the crane alongside Gary's reel line while running another reel line.

The tip of the crane's boom was encountered, and the boom was followed south to the cab, which lies on its side with its mounting wheels pointed south. The boom is a lattice work of steel beams that increase in size as the cab is neared. Due to the low visibility, not much could be seen of the cab except the top parts above the thermocline. This included some machinery parts on the west side and the boiler at the east end of the cab. A strong southeast current was also encountered on the top parts of the crane. After returning to the mooring block, the barge was located and explored. The deck was just above the thermocline, affording better visibility, but the strong current made swimming its length difficult. The wreck, which lies east-west, was circled a couple of times, and it was noticed there were very few fish on the deck, which is usually crowded with bass and perch. Two large deck winches are mounted on the northeast and southwest corners of the wreck, and at the center of the deck is a large circular turret where the crane was once mounted. There are several rectangular openings around the deck that reveal small, heavily silted compartments below.

After surfacing it was decided due to the windy weather to dive some additional wrecks close to shore. Heading about 4 miles down the coast, the wreck of the "Paddy Murphy" was found just to the west of Huntington Beach Park in 12' of water. The "Paddy Murphy" was a 69' x 17' wooden tug built in 1882. In April, 1888, it caught fire while towing a schooner off the coast and was run aground without loss of life. There is not much left of the tug, and it makes a small target to hook. Light sporadic rain fell briefly while attempting to hook it. After a while the anchor was simply dropped near the wreck, and Scott ran a reel line to find it. The bottom is sand, and the visibility was about 3'-5'. The wreck points south towards the shore, which is a cliff not more than 100'-200' away. All that is left of the ship is a small compound engine, shaft, propeller, and the wooden hull immediately underneath these parts. The compound engine lies on its side pointing to the west (starboard side). Its piston rods and cranks can all be easily examined inside the engine's trussing, and they connect to the propeller shaft. This shaft runs to the north and connects to a 4-bladed propeller, which has two of its blades buried in the sand. A metal pipe is also partially buried behind the propeller. The remaining wood structure stands about 3' off the bottom and lies on the east side of the machinery parts. A lot of golf balls were found underneath the wreck and arranged decoratively on top of the wreck.

After the dive while heading west along the coast towards the next wreck, a detour was made to explore a secret pirate cave hidden in a Lake Erie cliff. Scott anchored close offshore, and "Wreck-Reation's" crew swam stealthily ashore. They penetrated deep into the cave and fully explored it using cave snorkeling techniques. The cave goes back a surprising distance, has a untouchably high ceiling, is half-filled with water to a 3' depth, and has neat polished and decorative stone formations inside, including undercuts, ledges, and smooth walls. There were also decorative brown, orange, and yellow-colored striations and layers within the rock walls. Occasional surges from waves would funnel into the cave, causing a lot of crashing and spraying, and the constant sound of echoing water made for an interesting environment. Gary's boat, however, chose to leave the scene without putting divers in the water and headed home due to a lack of a proper Cave Snorkeling certification.

Once back aboard the boat, rain clouds moved in from the south, and it started to rain steadily. The water remained calm and flat, however, so the diving continued! The next wreck was around Avon Point headed towards Lorain. It was the "Alva B," another tug that sank in shallow water. The "Alva B" was a 74' x 18' wooden tug built in 1890, and in November, 1917, while World War I was underway, the tug was traveling from Sandusky, OH, to Cleveland, OH. It was being delivered to the U.S. government for war duty when it sprung a leak in a storm and was beached. The crew made it safely ashore before the storm completely destroyed the tug. Another alternate story, however, involves the crew drinking heavily and accidentally beaching the tug. The wreck is within a few hundred feet of shore on a hard rock bottom, and care must be taken when approaching the wreck since it is only in 9' of water and the boiler comes to

within 2'-3' of the surface. The water was clear enough to see the boiler upon approach, and some wooden hull wreckage lies west of the boiler.

After hooking into this wooden wreckage and entering the water, a great 5'-8' of visibility was discovered, allowing the wreck to be easily explored. The flattened wooden hull section lies east-west, stands 2'-3' high, and has the propeller shaft connected to it. The missing propeller and stern would have been on the western end. A fallen single-cylinder engine is on the eastern end of the wreckage and lies on its side to the south (starboard side). The mechanical linkages connecting the engine's piston to the propeller shaft can be investigated inside the engine's support truss, and a large toothed gear is attached to the end of the shaft east of the engine. It is a short jump to the boiler, which has its firebox on the western end. The firebox is open and allows the partial inspection of the insides of the boiler. The boiler lies on its side, and the base of its flue points south. Due to the shallow depth, the boiler makes a convenient place to stop halfway through the dive, stand up on it, and have a conversation about the dive so far. To the south of the main wooden wreckage is a large fallen rudder that almost blends into the rock bottom and has an attached steering quadrant on its south end. A big sheephead, some large bass, and perch were seen on the wreck, making this wreck one of the liveliest wrecks of the day. After the dive, the anchor wouldn't come unhooked, so Scott snorkeled to free it. Yep, the wreck is pretty shallow!

The steady, hard rain continued while the lake remained flat, so on the way home everyone wore their masks, hoods, and wetsuits to be able to see through the rain and keep the sting of the raindrops away while cruising at speed. Believe it or not, it was a fun ride! "Wreck-Reation" stopped at Jackelope's restaurant at the mouth on the Black River for dinner, and while they were dining, the rain finally stopped. They then returned to the slip to unload the boat and head home wet, tired, but happy from the day's diving.