

On Sunday, 10/10/99, Mike Holda and Kevin Magee drove Mike's 19' boat "Erie Lady" up to the eastern basin of Lake Erie to go diving. Cindy LaRosa had work commitments that day and was unable to make the trip. Despite a bad weather forecast, the weather was perfect. No rain was encountered, and the lake was dead flat with a mirror finish and a few small ripples. Air temperature ranged from 65-60 deg. F, and no wind beyond a slight breeze was encountered. This beats the 2'-4' seas and rain that was predicted, which is more proof that you should never set your plans by what the weather guessers say. The only non-ideal weather condition was the gray overcast, which appeared 10 minutes before the first dive and remained for the entire day.

The first dive was on the steamer "Dean Richmond," one of the few wooden ships to be turtle on the bottom. There are two buoys on the Dean, a big one at the bow (NE) and a smaller submerged bleach bottle at the stern (SW). We chose to anchor to the stern due to its more interesting features. The large rudder is intact, and one of the two propellers is still there. Despite being turtle, it is possible at various points to easily slip underneath the gunwales and inside the wreck. Although we did not penetrate due to the 110' depth and limited bottom time, we did peek underneath into the cargo hold near the stern. If properly equipped, penetration diving on the Dean would be very rewarding. We swam the length of the wreck, then returned along the other side. The debris field is extensive, including a pole or mast stuck vertically into the bottom near the bow. Many dives could be spent just examining the debris field around this wreck.

Although we expected bad viz, we were rewarded with 60'-80' viz and enough ambient light to not require lights, despite the overcast conditions. It seems that even late in the year, diving in the eastern basin is still very good. Other than the slightly reduced ambient light, Mike reports that viz was almost as good as when he and Cindy dove this wreck a few weeks ago. Water temperature was a typical east-end 45-48 deg F. Despite diving wet, we were not particularly chilled for a 26 minute dive. The thermocline is at 60 ft. but is not sharply delineated and is spread out over many feet. Surface temperature was 60 deg F.

During the boat trip to the second dive site, a fog moved in but then dissipated after mooring to the second wreck. We later learned upon returning to the shore that the fog remained covering the land. The second dive of the day was on the barque "Indiana," AKA "The Stone Wreck." There is one submerged buoy on this wreck near the bow (N). Although most eastern basin wrecks are buoyed, a fair number of them have submerged buoys, which float 3-5 ft. below the water and are only visible when right on top of them. Anyone planning to boat in the eastern basin should become proficient at hooking into these types of buoys, which have several different designs and require the use of boat hooks, nets, and/or a free-diver to capture them. I'm not sure why they are this way, but I think it protects the wrecks from boat traffic and/or people who don't have the wreck coordinates. In fact, we initially could not find the Indiana, but then we tried a second set of coordinates 0.16 miles away, which turned out to be the correct

numbers. Without these correct numbers, there might as well not have been a buoy on the wreck. This is actually a pretty neat system, and maybe we could try some submerged buoys on our own wrecks in the central basin. This system, in fact, might avoid the wrath of the Coast Guard and freighter organization, and they wouldn't even have to know they are there. Maybe this is why they are used in the eastern basin in the first place.

The Stone Wreck gets its name from the cargo of stone it was carrying, which was instrumental in the eventual identification of this wreck. The stone appears to be a type of reddish sandstone, which I believe is unique to the Buffalo area from which it set sail. The Indiana has cut stone scattered everywhere on the upper decks and uncut stone below decks in what little remains of the collapsed hold. This ship reminds me a lot of the "S.F. Gale" in the central basin in character, size, layout, and stone cargo. The bow is more intact than the Gale's, and the two masts are both down. One lies off the western side of the stern, and the other lies near the bow pointing north. There are also deadeyes, belay pins, and block and tackle aboard this wreck, which are neat to see. Overall, a very nice wreck and ideal as a second dive at a 90' depth. The bottom temperature was a little warmer at 47-49 deg F, and viz was a little less at 40'-60'.

One interesting item of note that I hadn't noticed before: there were swarms of small 3" gobies covering both the Dean and the Indiana. I've never before seen a gobie in the eastern basin, and most eastern divers give you a "huh?" look if you ask about them. It looks like they've finally arrived. I can't say if there are less zebra mussels yet, but it is probably only a matter of time. Some of the eastern wrecks have been getting heavily covered in zebra mussels lately, so the gobies arrival might be a good thing. That's it for the eastern basin dive crew. How about the central basin and Florida?