

On Sunday, July 2, and Monday, July 3, eight braves souls (and Soules) traveled to the eastern basin of Lake Erie to make some truly great dives with Jim Herbert of Osprey Dive Charter. On the trip were Dave and Annette Soule, Mike and Georgeann Wachter, Heather Marks, Martie Truby, Gary Humel, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee. Also joining us was Joyce Hayworth, who some may have met at the shipwreck festival that is held in Sandusky every year in November. Also joining us on Sunday was Jay Cole, a prosecutor from Cindy's workplace. Several other divers were also on the boat each day, including Claudio, a visiting Italian who was in the U.S. working. A total of 12-13 people were on the boat each day, which was no problem because of the size and comfort of Herbert's boat.

On Sunday afternoon, after making the 2 hour drive out to Barcelona, NY, we met up at the Barcelona Harbor Restaurant for lunch, then headed to the boat next door. The weather was warm and sunny and the lake was calm with 1'-2' seas. The trip out to the dive sites was uneventful except for one unscheduled stop several miles outside the harbor to investigate a zodiac who was following us ("Yikes, could it be...?"). It turned out to only be a prospective customer who was curious about the dive boat and wanted to learn more about the charter.

The first dive was on the "Brunswick," a wooden steamer in about 100' of water. The down line, which normally ties to the boiler, was not in place and was instead tied about 50' off the wreck to the bottom. All divers except one, who was not in our group, found their way over to the wreck, and there was enough bottom time to swim from the stern to the bow and back again. The wreck is now silted completely up to her gunwales and deck, and all cargo openings are filled with silt, but her boiler, deck equipment, and bow are still above the lake bottom. This is apparently a big change from when she was first discovered in the 1980's when she was still 5' out of the mud.

One small problem was encountered when it was discovered that Claudio, who had buddied with Kevin, Cindy, and Jay, only had 600 psi at the bow halfway through the dive and was almost completely out of air by the time the stern was reached again. This required his being "assisted" to the surface on a free ascent with a long hose. There was enough air and time for a 3 minute safety stop. He surfaced about 100' away from the boat and had to swim back with his snorkel, but he was otherwise okay. Afterwards, it was discovered that he had only started the dive with about 2000 psi, either because of his familiarity with the metric system (200 bar = 3000 psi, not 2000 psi) and/or because he was used to the European steel tanks (2200 psi = 75 cu. ft., but only 55 cu. ft. for an aluminum 80). It was also his first lake dive, and he may have been breathing a tad heavy. In any case, most - but not all - divers found the regular upline again, and all surfaced fairly close to the boat.

The second dive was the "Carlingford," a beautiful wooden schooner that sank in 95' of water at the same time as the "Brunswick," mainly because they collided

with each other. The "Carlingford" sank immediately after the collision in the early morning hours of the 1880's, and the "Brunswick" sank later several miles away while trying to reach shore. The "Carlingford" is in beautiful condition except for the large hole on her port bow where she was struck. The stern decking is also missing, but this allows her standing rudder post to be examined along with the nice curved lines of the underside of her aft hull. Because she is still 10' above the bottom, the area under her decks is easily penetrated, and the full length of her can be swam inside the cargo holds. A large centerboard divides her for most of her length, and she can be entered/exited at several points through large cargo openings. Also notable on the wreck are her anchors, deck machinery, mast pieces, and obvious deck/hull construction techniques - all layed out for easy viewing.

Unfortunately, the viz for both Sunday dives was fairly disappointing at only 30'-40', which is fantastic for the central basin but is the poorest they've had in the eastern basin so far this year. Lighting conditions were bright and no lights were needed, but viz wasn't up to the 80'-100' that is typical. A spread out thermocline was evident at 70'-75', where the temperature drops from a surface temperature of about 65 deg F to a bottom temperature of 42-43 deg F. Immediately below the thermocline and slowly decreasing with depth, the temperature is 51 deg F. Despite the cold bottom temperatures, half of the group dove wet and found the dives to be tolerable due to the limited exposure time at depth and because Jim's boat is warm and dry with lots of protection from the elements inside the large crew cabin.

After a good night's sleep at the Theater Motel, diving was resumed Monday morning on the "Acme," an arched wooden steamer. Unfortunately, the weather turned bad overnight with light rain and heavy overcast, but the lake was still calm at 1'-2' seas, so we went out. It was a good decision because Monday was some great diving! The viz had improved dramatically overnight to about 60'-70', making for spectacular viewing of the "Acme." The wreck is in 130' of water, but lighting was bright despite the overcast, and there was enough time at depth to swim from her stern to the bow and back. Both structural arches are standing, and while the wreck is silted up to her gunwales and deck, her hatches and deck machinery are all visible along with her engine and boiler. The structural arches are striking and something not normally seen except on the deeper wreck "Arches."

A rebreather diver joined the group for the Monday dives and was the first in the water. We knew there was a problem when we started seeing LOTS of bubbles as we descended down towards the wreck. It turned out that he had a leak in his drysuit zipper, but he continued the dive and was able to safely get out of the water despite being cold and fairly negatively buoyant. He managed to fix the zipper and did the second dive despite a soaked suit and wet underwear. Hard core!

The second dive was on "Schooner B," a.k.a. the "Washington Irving," and also sometimes referred to as the "Plow Boy." It is in 115' of water and is mostly under silt except the starboard rail, some bow machinery, an anchor, and two large, beautiful standing masts. The wreck is at a tilt to port, and both masts reach at least 50' up at an angle. At the top of each mast are some cross members. Also notable on the wreck is a completely intact bowsprit stretching maybe 30' out in front of the ship. Overall, this is a unique wreck because it is the only one with standing masts that can be reached in relatively shallow water at recreational depths. The only other one is "Schooner X / St. James," which is much deeper at 160'-170'.

Because of the two deep back-to-back dives, a little deco was incurred by some of the group members, so a lot of time was spent hanging out at 15'. It was a party. Gary Humel showed his happiness by performing his Don Nichols honorary salute to anyone who would look, and some group dancing was also observed on the boat. If you didn't come, you missed some great diving! Many thanks to Dave and Annette, who suggested this spur-of-the-moment trip in the first place. Let's all do it again sometime.