

On Saturday, September 9, Cindy LaRosa and Kevin Magee went diving aboard Osprey Dive Charter (Jim Herbert) in Barcelona, NY. The weather was gray and overcast with scattered showers, but the water conditions were moderate at 2' seas. However, the water was choppy, and there were occasional 3' swells, making for an easy trip out to the wreck site but causing a rough time while gearing up. The wreck was the "Crow's Nest," a.k.a. the "Tiller Wreck" or "Oxford." It is a wooden two-masted brig that sank in 1856 after colliding with the steamer "Cataract" southeast of Long Point. The lake bottom is at 155', but a depth of 165' can be achieved by descending into the crater at the bow, which is pointing southeast.

After hanging an oxygen stage bottle at 15' for Cindy and gearing up, we noticed a bat flying around the boat and eating flies. This is the first time we've ever seen a bat so far out over the lake away from the sight of land, but at least there was plenty of food for him to eat. Before entering the water, a heavy downpour started, but we were undeterred. Descending to the wreck, we discovered that it was fairly dark, requiring the use of lights to see. Visibility, however, was gin-clear at an estimated 50'-100', although this was hard to judge. Everything was easily viewable, and your light beam seemed to penetrate forever.

The mooring line is tied to the stern, which is at about 130'. At the stern is a beautifully preserved and intact tiller, which was used to turn the rudder. Tillers are usually seen only on early wrecks, and later ships used wheels. The tiller is a highlight of the wreck and is fairly large at maybe 10' in length. The stern itself is in beautiful condition and completely undamaged. Hovering off the back, one can see that it rises completely out of the mud bottom, exposing the entire rudder and underside lines of the hull. The stern is attractively shaped and has davit posts sticking straight out rearwards from the corners, giving a streamlined appearance to the vessel.

Swimming forward, a large cabin opening is evident, but the cabin is gone - blown off by escaping air during the ship's sinking - exposing easy access to the holds and interior of the ship. Forward of this along the deck are a hand pump, cargo hatch, main mast hole, winch, and another cargo opening. Forward of this, the bow disintegrates into a jumble of boards as it disappears into the bottom of the crater. It must have hit hard. Deadeyes and belaying pins are visible along both sides' railings, which are mostly intact and standing. No damage to the decking or sides is evident until reaching the bow. There are supposedly two anchors among the debris at the bow, but in two dives on this wreck, Kevin has not noticed them.

Lying off to the port side is the forward mast, which has its square-rigged cross member in place. The main mast rests pointing upwards diagonally against the cross member, which points upwards diagonally in a perpendicular direction. At their junction is what appears to be a crow's nest, although we are told it is actually the structural bracing. In any case, this is another highlight of the wreck,

and it is viewable at about 140'-145'. Within the junction, a burbot fish was found hiding. This must be a favorite spot since Kevin found another burbot - perhaps the same one - in this location the last time he dove this. A second burbot was also seen on the starboard railing, and a third burbot was seen by Cindy peaking out from between two boards at the stern.

After swimming the length and back twice, Cindy was out of bottom time (10 minutes) and ascended. After seeing her up, Kevin continued to explore the wreck more thoroughly, then ascended for a total bottom time of 20 minutes. Total run time was 41 minutes, although Kevin extended this to 49 minutes to clear his air computer for possible later diving during the weekend. Cindy stayed at the deco bar waiting for Kevin to return, so her run time was the same, and her computer was VERY clear. Bottom temperature was 41 deg. F, and the thermocline was at 83 ft. It is a beautiful wreck, and despite the darkness, it was a very pleasant and memorable dive.