

On Sunday, July 15, Kevin Magee and Cindy LaRosa headed to Barcelona, NY, to dive with Osprey Dive Charter in the eastern basin of Lake Erie. It was a beautiful day to be out on the lake with the sky clear and sunny, and the weather was pleasant and not too hot. The seas were 1'-2' with a mild breeze blowing from the northeast. The wreck was the "Arches," which has been identified as either the "Oneida" (1893), "Ohio" (1859), or the "Idaho" (1897). In any case it is an arched steamer that sank on the Canadian side off Long Point in 150' of water. About an hour boat ride is required to reach the site.

After entering the water and descending, lighting conditions on the bottom were found to be somewhat dark with a light initially being required to see the wreck and read ones gauges. However, towards the end of the dive, ones eyes adjusted to the darkness, and everything could be seen without a light. Visibility was good at an estimated 50'-70'. The mooring line was tied to the engine at the stern, and the engine is in good shape. All superstructure is missing, but the hull is intact and in very good shape. Forward of the engine and boiler can be seen some kind of hatch cover, possibly of a sliding design, which is unique and may have provided easier access to the equipment spaces. Several hatch openings are visible along the deck as one moves towards the bow. Most notable are the structural hogging arches, which frame both sides of the ship. They gracefully curve along the length of the ship like a trussed bridge structure with vertical supports at regular intervals. They run about two-thirds of the length of the ship and rise to a depth of about 125'. They provided ships of this design with structural reinforcement along their length and were very popular in early steamer designs. Sometimes they were hidden in the cabin superstructure so their presence was not obvious, and sometimes they were external and quite obvious.

Amidships is a single mast hole with the fallen mast lying nearby on the deck and running towards to bow along the starboard side. Inside the cargo hold forward of this point is what appeared to be horse-drawn plowshares stacked along the port side, a very interesting piece of cargo if this is indeed what they were. An attempt by Kevin to investigate later was thwarted by someone who had beaten him to it and had silted the area to zero visibility. At the bow was seen a windlass, and both anchors were hanging in place at the extreme bow. The anchors are classic fluted designs with large wooden stocks. The starboard one was hung with the flutes pointed down, and the port one was somewhat more hidden with the flutes pointed up. The bow was intact and showed a sturdy type of construction that appeared more functional than graceful. Swimming back along the length of the hull, it can be seen to rise between 5'-8' off the bottom, and there appears to be at least 3'-5' of open space inside the cargo holds. The deck is intact with no collapses but covered in several feet of silt. The wreck can easily be swum at a 130'-135' depth for easy viewing. Upon reaching the stern it was discovered that fishnet covered the port side, hiding the undersides from view. Moving to the starboard side revealed the underside curvature of the hull and one blade of the propeller sticking out. A small portion of another blade was

also barely visible on the starboard side, but no rudder was seen. It was either hidden by the nets or missing.

Zebra mussel encrustation was heavy, but the shape of most objects can still be made out. The bottom temperature was 40 deg F with the thermocline at 60'. Cindy also detected another smaller thermocline at about 45'. Above 60' the visibility dropped to just 10'-15', but the surface temperature was 69 deg F. Above 30' was a strong current headed southwest, surprisingly in a direction opposite of the wind. One diver doing her deco lost sight of the line and surfaced more than 1/2 mile away. It was apparently a long swim back to the boat. Cindy's bottom time was about 10 minutes, and Kevin's was 20 minutes. Max depth was 151', and total run time was 50 minutes.

It should be noted that the "Arches" appears to be very similar to the "Acme," another arched steamer that sank on the American side near Dunkirk in 130' of water. This wreck was dove on the second day of last year's LEWD trip to the eastern basin (remember the re-breather diver with a faulty drysuit zipper?). However, while more accessible, the "Acme" is in slightly worse shape. It has no anchors, has some damage to the hull and deck, and is silted up to its gunwales with all cargo spaces filled. However, both are wonderful representations of what an arched steamer with the distinctive hogging arches looked like.