

On Sunday, August 19, Cindy LaRosa and Kevin Magee went diving in the eastern basin of Lake Erie on Jim Herbert's Osprey Charter boat "Southwind." The weather was overcast and heavy rain was encountered on the drive to Barcelona, but only a light drizzle and a calm lake with just 1' seas was found once arriving. On the ride out to the wreck, the skies cleared and the sun came out, making for beautiful diving weather. The wreck was the "St. James," also known as "Schooner X." It is a two-masted schooner that sank in 165' of water in 1870 under unknown circumstances since there were no survivors. It is considered one of the most intact wrecks in the lake and is a premier dive site for advanced divers. Just before arriving at the dive site, a large laker passed in front and right over the dive site. Upon reaching the site, no mooring was found, probably cut by the laker. So, a diver was sent in to attach another mooring before anchoring the boat into the wreck. Care must be taken when anchoring into this wreck because of the two standing masts, which could be pulled down by a careless boat that tangles its line around them.

Upon descending to the wreck, it was found that conditions were very dark, requiring the use of strong lights to see anything. This seems to pretty much be the norm right now on the eastern basin's deeper wrecks near Long Point. Furthermore, it was stirred up by those divers first on the wreck, which reduced viz to 5'-10' around the mooring line. Once clear of the line, viz improved to an estimated 50'-100'. The mooring was attached to the bow. Behind the mooring was the forward mast, which can be seen to be standing straight up. A spiral pattern can be seen cut into the mast's wood, and the bracing bars were visible silhouetted against the dim surface light. The deck is at 150' and can easily be viewed by swimming above it a depth of 140'-145', even in the dark conditions. Swimming towards the stern along the starboard side, the hatches were seen, complete with rare hatch covers, which usually blow off the ship when it sinks. Deadeyes were seen on the rails adjacent to the two masts.

Upon reaching the stern, a disturbing sight was found. The aft mast, which up until recently was standing straight up, is now leaning to the port side and aft at about a 60 deg angle. The fife rail around the base of the mast is beginning to be crushed. Furthermore, it was noticed that the starboard divot was missing on the stern. This divot, along with the port one, stick straight out rearwards from the stern and are what the yawl boat was once attached to. Fortunately, other trademark features of this wreck are still intact. The low-lying cabin, another rare feature that usually blows off when a ship sinks, is still there, but the walls did appear to be a little more broken up than can be remembered in previous dives. It was once harder to see inside the cabin except through the companionways at the rear, but now there appears to many opening around the whole perimeter, making the silted-in interior easily visible from many angles. It is possible the silt has diminished in depth around the cabin, making things more visible than in the past. Another nice feature of the wreck is its wheel at the center of the aft deck. Since the deck is heavily silted, only half of the wheel is visible.

Swimming back to the bow along the port side, care had to be taken to avoid some snagged netting on the gunwale near the bow. The bow contains two classic fluted anchors, one on each side, and a windlass in the middle. Another trademark of the wreck is its bowsprit, which still has its supporting chains and a rare figurehead under the bowsprit. The zebra mussels have been rubbed away to reveal a scrolled rams head, and this is the only figurehead known to be in Lake Erie. The bow stands high off the bottom by about 10', and a small tree can be seen at its base trapped underneath a fallen mast part.

Bottom temperature was tolerable at about 40 deg F, although 38 deg F was noted briefly on the dive. A double thermocline was evident at 70' and 30' with very poor viz in between, but surface viz was at least 15'-20'. The surface temperature was a warm 73 deg F. Before the dive, Kevin learned how to use duct tape to repair a torn wrist seal in his drysuit and discovered that it works surprisingly well, although his arm was still wet after the dive. In any case, he wasn't cold. Maximum depth was 161', bottom time was 20 minutes, and total run time was 57 minutes. It would be very nice to get back to this wreck next season and see how much more the aft mast has fallen, plus see this excellent wreck under better viewing conditions.