

On Sunday, July 14, Cindy LaRosa and Kevin Magee arose bright and early to go diving with Osprey Charters on Jim Herbert's new boat "Horizon" out of Dunkirk, NY. After a 3-hr drive, they arrived at the public dock in the middle of the waterfront to find a lot of convenient parking right in front of the boat. Directions to the dock were easy. A Ramada hotel was also noted to be conveniently located only a few hundred yards away.

The new boat is fantastic. It's bigger and has enormous amounts of room, it has a small bar (liquor license pending) and huge interior, and - best of all - it has a sun deck on top with six picnic tables. The sun deck proved to be the most popular place for people to gather to warm up and admire the 360 deg. panoramic view. While the "Horizon" is not a dedicated dive boat like the "Southwind," it has all the amenities, including gear stations/benches, dive platform/ladder, and easy access up to the boat from the water.

After admiring the boat, nineteen divers were counted, and the trip was underway. Among the divers attending were LEWD/Amigo member Ken Marshall, many Aqua Amigos, some of Jim's regulars, and several beginner divers. John Duff, a descendent of the "C.B. Benson's" captain/owner, was unfortunately not in attendance. The trip was a short one hour ride across the lake in beautiful conditions of less than 1' seas and comfortable 80 deg F temperatures. Upon coming within sight of Port Colborne in Canada, it was discovered that two boats were already tied up to the mooring of the "C.B. Benson," and they had just entered the water. So, it was decided to just slowly drift by and drop off our divers for a short swim to the mooring line.

The wreck was the "C.B. Benson," which is a historic vessel that sank in 1893 with no survivors, including the captain, John Duff, in 75' of water. It was a three-masted wooden barkentine made for ocean travel, and it was the first ship to successfully make a trip from the Great Lakes across the Atlantic to Europe with a cargo to be sold at profit. Because of its historic nature, there was an archaeological survey done by the Niagara Divers Association when it was first discovered, and many items now have plastic tags identifying them as part of the survey. This added to the uniqueness of the dive.

Upon descending, it was found that the thermocline was at 50' with 75 deg F water above and 50 deg F. water below. Visibility was 15'-25' on the surface and about 40'-50' on the bottom, which was considered great, especially considering the bad visibility experienced in the lake lately. It was also discovered that the concrete mooring block is off the wreck at a significant distance of 60'-80' with no guideline, so it had to be guessed which direction to swim initially. The wreck was found west of the mooring with the bow pointing east towards it. The bow sits high off the bottom by about 8'. No bow sprint is present, but the sides and decking are intact with a windlass, square tow bit, a hand pump, and 8' tall mast stub. Around the mast about 5' off the deck is a fife ring with a block still hanging from it. Behind the mast is the first cargo hatch, and two more blocks can be

seen lying on the bottom inside. The decking and side planks start to become missing at this hatch, and the level of the deck starts to descend lower towards the bottom. On the starboard side of the bow is a schooner-style sail boom sticking out of the mud at a 45 deg angle with a crescent moon cutout for resting against the mast. It was also reported that an anchor fluke was sticking out of the mud near the bow, although Kevin and Cindy failed to notice it.

Aft of the first hatch was discovered the capstan, then another hatch with anchor chain rolled around a drum, a small winch, and the second mast's short stub with a fife rail around it and belaying pins still in the rail. On the starboard side are the remains of part of the forward mast, complete with its structural bracing platform (falsely called a crow's nest) and the smaller topmast still attached above it for about 5'-8' before it is snapped off. As a bonus, the remains of a square-rigged sail cross member was also seen still attached to the main mast just below the platform. The whole structure lies across the railing at a 45 deg angle pointing aft and reaching about 10'-15' off the bottom.

Going further aft, another hatch was encountered with more rigging blocks lying around it. This is where the bottom meets the deck's level, and afterwards the wreck lies in a small trench that reaches a 3' silt wall at the stern. Another hatch and square post are further aft, then the 10' tall remains of the third mast are seen followed by the square-shaped stern. Sticking out of the mud can be seen the rudder post and steering gear on top of it. Lying on the port side of the rudder post is the ship's wheel, which used to be found on top of the gear. Along the transom are two prominent, but empty, yawl boat davits. Pulled against the stern is a concrete block, the remains of the second (inactive) mooring that was pulled by a large boat up against the wreck some time ago.

Overall, this is an excellent wreck. It has lots of neat features and items to see. In addition to the deck equipment and rigging blocks, the rails have many deadeyes on them and there are pieces of masts and other structure lying around. However, the wreck is not completely intact and much of the decking and sides are gone. It is also obvious that the stern is sinking into the bottom. Some objects are heavily encrusted with zebra mussels while other items are bare wood. Many large gobies were seen on the wreck.

For the second dive, the "McGrath," a.k.a. "Stone Wreck #2," was chosen. It was a two-masted schooner carrying a cargo of stone when it sank in 1878 in 85' of water. Conditions on this wreck were not quite as good as on the "C.B. Benson." The thermocline was at 56'-57', and the bottom viz was somewhat less at about 30'-40', at least until more divers arrived and started kicking up the bottom. Afterwards it went to 10' of viz. This wreck sits high off the bottom by about 5'-7', and the sides are completely intact. The bow lies south with the concrete mooring block off the starboard side near the stern. This time a guideline was present for the 40'-50' swim to the wreck. The rudder post, minus the steering gear and wheel, is present, and there is a large opening in the aft deck where the

cabin used to be located. Cabins usually get blown off sinking wrecks by the escaping air, and the "McGrath" reportedly sank very quickly within sight of two other vessels during a storm.

Under the aft deck can be seen piled stone with about 2'-3' of space between the stone and the underneath of the deck. There is a cargo hatch towards the forward end of the existing decking, then the rest of the deck is missing, exposing the insides of the cargo hold and the centerboard of the ship. Attached to the centerboard is a winch, still structurally clamped by four legs to the centerboard. A little further forward is the remains of the capstan, which was attached to the deck and has fallen sideways to the bottom on the starboard side of the centerboard. Stone cargo and pieces of the decking can be seen scattered inside the wreck.

At the bow the decking is briefly intact again. The windlass and a small opening to the chain locker below deck is visible. Also present is a single barreled hand pump with some partial movement of its mechanisms still possible. At the extreme bow is the fallen remains of the large bow sprit. It is resting in its notch and points downwards with the tip embedded in the bottom. Its diameter is a good 2'-3', and it extends for a long way, perhaps 25'-35'. Overall, it is very impressive. On the port side under the bow sticking partially out of the mud can be seen the tip of a wooden spindle, perhaps off the windlass or some other piece of equipment.

Overall, it was a very nice day. To cap it off, Cindy and Kevin stopped by the Erie, PA, harbor on the way home to see the "Viking I," which is permanently moored near the Bicentennial Tower. It is a large steel ship that functioned as railroad car carrier, and it is very close in appearance and function to the "Marquette & Bessemer #2," which mysteriously disappeared in a storm in 1909 and has never been found. The "Viking" is only 10' longer and 2' larger in beam and height than the "M&B#2," and it is hard to understand how such a large vessel could hide in Lake Erie for so long. The "Viking" looks like the "M&B#2" except for the large single smokestack instead of the "M&B#2's" two smaller smokestacks and a stern gate where the "M&B#2" had none. This missing feature may have contributed towards its sinking. It was nice to stand there and speculate what the "M&B" must look like now on the bottom in Lake Erie. Someday, it'll be found, and then we'll get to dive it.