

On Saturday, September 14, fifteen (15) intrepid LEWD members went diving in Tobermory, Ontario. Tobermory is near the tip of the Bruce Peninsula in the Georgian Bay of Lake Huron. It is the location of the Fathom Five National Marine Park, which is famous for its wrecks, water clarity, and cold water temperatures. This trip was made possible thanks to Mike & Georgann Wachter, who won a free one-day charter with G+S Charters while attending the Shipwrecks 2002 festival in Welland, Ontario. Also diving were Dave & Annette Soule, Dave & Linda Salmi, Monica Dobies, Greg Ondus, Greg Koeth, Allan & son Richard King, Ann Stephenson, KB, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee. KB's girlfriend Carmen also came along and played tourist in picturesque Tobermory while everyone was diving.

Despite being 450 miles from Cleveland, the drive itself takes about 10 hours because of the slow country roads in Ontario with many small towns and stoplights along the way. The peninsula itself is remote and secluded. Therefore, everyone left Friday morning to make the long drive and be ready Saturday morning. Saturday's weather dawned with a sunny blue sky, 1' seas, and 70 deg F air temperatures. The dive boat for the day was the "Lark," a converted tug, with Captain Dave at the helm.

The first dive was on the famous "Arabia," a three-masted barque that sank in 100' of water during heavy seas in 1884. No lives were lost, but since the wreck's discovery in 1971, at least 12 divers have lost their lives on this wreck, giving it a dangerous reputation. Upon arriving it was discovered that another G+S boat with the Sandusky, OH, dive club Bay Area Divers (BAD) was already tied to the mooring line, so our boat tied up behind it. A very strong current was soon discovered to be running, making getting from the rear of the boat to the mooring line extremely difficult. It was required to pull oneself hand-over-hand along ropes because the current was too strong to swim against. Many used 500+ psi in air just getting to the mooring line at the bow of the first boat, making for a thinner margin of safety on this relatively deep dive.

Upon arriving at the bottom a concrete mooring block was found with a long 50'-70' swim required along a small secondary line several feet off the bottom to actually reach the wreck. Fortunately, the current subsided below 30' in depth, and ambient light conditions were present on the bottom along with about 20' of visibility. The line was tied to the starboard side of the bow, which points NW. The ship's hull is intact and stands 15' off the bottom. The bowsprit is intact along with its supporting chains running to the hull. The forecastle deck is also intact with a windlass and square bit on it. Both anchors - classic wood stocked designs - are hanging from the railings with their chains going into the hawser pipes.

Despite the good condition of the bow, swimming aft it was discovered that the rest of the decking is missing, exposing the inside of the hold, which is filled with various debris and equipment. The railings are still intact and have deadeyes

and pulley blocks on them. The centerboard box is standing, and the centerboard can be seen inside it. Nearby can be seen the centerboard winch lying in the bottom of the hold. Reaching the stern, the rudder is missing, leaving a narrow slot at the end of the tapered sides. On the port railing can be seen a memorial plaque for one of the divers who died there. On the starboard side the steering deck has slid off and is leaning up against the hull. The steering gear is evident on the deck, but the metal wheel is off and lying on the bottom. A plaque identifying the "Arabia" is next to it.

It can be seen why this wreck is so dangerous. Many people shortened their dives just to be able to make the long swim back along the bottom at maximum depth. This is probably where many in the past have run out of air. Despite this, everyone was able to return safely to the boat without incident. As a bonus, the bottom temperature was unexpectedly warm at 45 deg F, and the thermocline was spread out between 35'-40'. The surface water temperature was 65 deg F, and the surface viz was great at 30'-40'.

The second wreck was the "Philo Scoville," a wooden schooner that sank up against an island after hitting it during a storm. The wreck lies with the stern at about a 40' depth and the bow at 70'. In between is a steep rocky slope with the wreck badly broken up along it. The mooring is tied to a concrete block on the bottom near the bow, which roughly points N. The whole ship is split in half along the keel like a toy plastic model. The starboard half still resembles a ship at the bow, which is partially standing with its hawser pipe in place. On the inside can be seen a portion of the collapsed forecastle deck and a metal band for holding the jib boom and bowsprit together. The bowsprit itself is missing but is lying on the bottom off the starboard side. Still attached is its long jib boom with metal bands holding both pieces together. The jib boom's tip terminates at about an 85' depth, and a burbot, or ling cod, was found hiding along its length. Crayfish were also seen among the wreck's timbers.

The starboard side of the hull parallels the rocky slope and twists to lie flat along the bottom. Railing details are still noticeable, and the construction details of the inside of the hull can easily be seen. Deck knees are visible at some locations. The port side of the hull is split away and runs up the island's slope. Many scraps of wood can be seen scattered over a wide area. Visibility on the bottom was about 20' but improved to 30' up the slope. Bottom temperature was 55-57 deg F, and a very mild thermocline was noticed at 25'-30'.

The third wreck was the "W.L. Wetmore," a wooden steamer that was driven into the shallows during a storm in 1901. It lies on a rocky bottom in only 5'-20' of water and is scattered over a wide area. The hull parallels the shore, and the bow roughly points W. At the bow is a large wood stocked anchor on the bottom. Attached to it is a chain that threads itself through a hawser pipe and another metal fitting before terminating in a large pile that was once the location of the chain locker. Scattered all around the bottom are long metal nails which were

formerly used to hold the hull's planks together. Curiously, they happened by pure chance and coincidence to spell out "LEWD" on a flat metal plate nearby. Large rafts of wood that were once the sides and bottom of the ship lie in the area between the bow and stern.

Near the stern is a huge 10'-15' diameter boiler standing upright on its end with a smaller auxiliary boiler hanging off its side. The top of the boiler is only a few feet below the water's surface. Pieces of piping, valves, and engine room parts are scattered all over the bottom in this area. The mounting feet and base of the engine can be seen with a shaft running to a small portion of the stern where a four-bladed propeller is located. Three of its blades have been sheared off with only part of the fourth blade remaining. The huge wooden rudder is lying flat on the bottom nearby with the steering linkages still attached to the rudder post. Around the wreck were seen crayfish, a bass, small schools of minnows, and silty 'clouds' that actually turned out to be very small fish fry. Visibility was great at 30'-40', and the water temperature was balmy at 63 deg F.

Since we had the boat until 5:30 PM and since we were determined to dive some more, we entered Big Tub Harbor at Tobermory and dove the "Sweepstakes," a schooner that sank at the end of the long narrow harbor in 15' of water in 1867 after being damaged and towed there. Remarkably, the hull and deck are still intact despite the shallow water. A 100'-200' surface swim was required to reach the site from the mooring, but the deck is only 5'-8' under the water. A lot of effort has obviously been made to keep this wreck from falling apart. Many openings have boards nailed over them to prevent divers from entering the wreck and to help hold it together. Metal tie rods have been run back and forth inside the hull to hold it together. The bow points S and has the only piece of deck equipment, a picturesque windlass. No bowsprit is evident, and the railings are missing, leaving only the plain wooden deck, three cargo hatch frames, two mast holes, and the cabin opening at the stern.

The stern is mostly intact, and its underside and the half-buried rudder can be viewed. The rudder is turned slightly to port. The hatch and cabin openings can be entered and below decks viewed, but entry into the wreck itself under the decking is prevented by metal cages that form jail cell-styled enclosures. The sandy bottom around the wreck is covered in nice green weeds, and several juvenile fish were seen along with some small 1" gobies and a couple of black earthworm-like leaches crawling along the bottom. Visibility was 30', and the water temperature was 65 deg F. Overall, it is a picturesque wreck that can be easily dove or snorkeled. After swimming back to the boat, a glass bottomed boat came over the wreck for non-divers to view it. Sticking partially above water nearby can be seen the remains of the "City of Grand Rapids," a wooden steamer that burned in 1907.

Still not content, we headed to the fifth and last dive of the day, the "Alice G," a wooden tug that sank at the head of Little Tub Harbor along the shore in 1927

during a storm. It lies in 15'-25' of water on a sand and rock shelf not more than a few feet from shore. The shelf drops off to greater depths after a long sloping expanse, but the wreck is securely nestled against the shore with its wooden deck lying parallel to the shoreline. A small boiler lies on the deck amidships, and the inside of its firebox can be viewed. Its funnel lies on the sand on the starboard side. Behind the boiler lies the remains of its engine, which still has some control handles and equipment attached. A shaft can be seen running down the middle of the ship from the engine towards the stern. The stern retains its original attractive rounded shape and points NE. A sturdy, low railing outlines the fantail and sides. Beyond the boiler towards the bow the wreck is a nondescript raft of wood pushed upwards against a large rock outcropping. Very little of the hull or superstructure remain, and the ship is small in length. Some small fish and more leaches were seen around the wreck.

Afterwards, we had finally had enough diving. So, we entered the harbor, unloaded, cleaned ourselves up, and attended a pre-dinner wine and cheese party with the BAD divers, who were kind enough to invite us even though they were obviously jealous of our ability to do more dives than them during the day. Afterwards, we attended a buffet dinner that Joyce Hayward of BAD (and LEWD) had arranged and was kind enough to invited us. We pitched in by having KB entertain everyone with his guitar and singing of sea chanties. It would appear that everyone had a good time, and eventually we had to head off to bed to get some sleep for the next day's diving.

During the night, however, everyone was awoken to the sound of wind and rain. We awoke in the morning to find strong howling winds, dark overcast skies, and 2-3 meter waves. Once we figured out what a meter was (3.2808 feet), we knew there would be no diving. So everyone packed up, did a little sightseeing and shopping in town, then drove home early. This turned out to be for the best since it is a long drive, and it allowed everyone to get home at a reasonable hour Sunday night, unpack, and think about the great diving we'd had on Saturday. We can't wait for Mike and Georg to win another free charter next year!