

On Sunday, June 8, 2003, David VanZandt, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee headed to Barcelona, NY, to dive with Osprey Dive Charter in the eastern basin of Lake Erie. It was the first lake dive of the year for them due to the poor weather off Cleveland the entire spring. However, the day's weather was good with the sky mostly sunny, the temperature was about 70 deg F, and the seas were flat at less than 1'. Also joining them were Georgann and Mike Wachter, Greg Ondus, Jacques Girouard, Ken Marshall, Matt Ballish, Scott & Diann Shields, and three others for a total of 14 divers. Captaining was Sam Genco with Kathy Melice helping as crew. The wreck was the "Arches," which has been identified as either the "Oneida" (1893), "Ohio" (1859), or the "Idaho" (1897). The "Oneida" is the favored identification because the "Ohio" suffered a large explosion which is not evident on the wreck and because the "Idaho" sank in shallow water that allowed two people to be rescued off her forward mast. In any case, it is a wooden 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.

Because there was no mooring line, the wreck had to be grappled. The Wachters and Greg Ondus volunteered to go down first and check that the wreck was hooked. This was indicated by Greg shooting a lift bag to indicate all was well. This was done, and everyone proceeded to gear up and enter the water. After descending, it was found that the wreck was hooked on the starboard side very close to the stern. Lighting conditions on the bottom were found to be dark with a light being required to see the wreck and read one's gauges. However, towards the end of the dive one's eyes adjusted to the darkness, and the wreck could be dimly seen without a light, although details could not easily be made out. Visibility was also good at an estimated 40'-60'.

The engine is prominently visible at the stern and is in good shape. The boiler is hidden below deck. Forward of the engine is some kind of large hatch cover, possibly of a sliding design. This is an unusual feature and may have provided easier access to the equipment spaces. All superstructure is missing, but the hull is intact and in very good shape. The deck is also intact but has a thick layer of silt on it. Several hatch openings are visible as one moves towards the bow. The most notable feature of the wreck are the two hogging arches which frame both sides of the ship. They gracefully curve upwards along the length of the ship like a bridge structure with vertical supports at regular intervals. They run about two-thirds of the middle of the ship and rise to a depth of about 125'. They provided the ship with structural reinforcement along its 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 to the cabins' walls and quite obvious. Eventually they were eliminated as more modern hull designs and materials were used.

Amidships is a single mast hole with the fallen mast lying nearby on the deck and running towards the bow along the starboard side. Going inside one of the cargo holds, many small boards of lumber can be seen, partially stacked but mostly

jumbled along the port side of the cargo hold. A very thick layer of mud hides most of the details. It was suggested they could be staves from barrels, although no hoops were seen, and the stacking would suggest it was raw material. At the bow was seen a small windlass tucked very close to a massive square bow post, which terminates the prow. The bow is completely intact and shows a sturdy type of construction that appears more functional than graceful. The bow stands very high off the bottom by about 10'. Both anchors can also be seen at the bow. The starboard anchor is most noticeable since it is hanging by one fluke off the railing at the extreme bow. It was apparently almost stolen by some divers at one time who tried to raise it with lift bags but were caught in the act. The port anchor is less noticeable since it is lying flat on the small forecastle deck and is partially hidden underneath the other anchor. Both anchors are fluked designs with what appeared to be thin metal stocks, although this was hard to determine due to the zebra mussel coating.

Swimming back along the length of the hull, it rises between 5'-8' off the bottom, and there is at least 3'-5' of open space inside the cargo holds. Upon reaching the stern it was discovered that a hanging curtain of fishnet covers the gently rounded transom. The net starts at the gunwale and hangs straight down to the bottom. Some netting pieces also float above the gunwale. Most of the stern's undersides are hidden from view, especially at the extreme stern. However, there is a small gap on the port side in which one blade of the propeller can be glimpsed, but on the starboard side the netting ends and another blade of the propeller can be easily viewed sticking out of the mud. The prop is of an obviously old design with squared-off tips and only a simple twist without the complex curves seen in more modern propellers. It appears of the vintage of the "Monitor's" propeller, which was removed for preservation by NOAA last year. No rudder was seen. It was either hidden by the nets or missing.

Zebra mussel encrustation was moderate, but the shape of most objects can still be made out. The bottom temperature was 39-40 deg F with no thermocline but a definite gradual warming starting at 100'. Visibility on the surface was 10'-15', and the surface temperature was 50 deg F. A strong current was also encountered at the surface. The minute after having the last divers exit the water, a heavy thunderstorm downpour started. This was accompanied by many close lightning strikes. The combination of drenching rain, wind, and the threat of lightning moved everyone inside the "Southwind's" comfortable, heated cabin. The air temperature also got noticeably colder and dropped to 60 deg F. The ride back to Barcelona was accompanied by continuing storm and seas building to 3'-5' close to shore, but no problems were encountered. There was even time to find Greg's lift bag, which had drifted off the wreck and was recovered some distance away during the storm.