

On Sunday, July 20, 2003, David VanZandt and Kevin Magee went diving in the eastern basin of Lake Erie on Jim Herbert's Osprey Charter boat "Southwind." Also on the trip were Greg Ondus, Mike King, Pete Deegan, and many other technical divers to make for a full boat of about 15-17 divers. The weather was overcast and thunderstorms were predicted, but the lake was calm with just 1'-2' seas. The original wreck was going to be the "Swallow," but this was changed to the "Sir C.T. Straubenzie" because of the lack of a mooring line on the "Swallow" and the threat of storms that would have made grappling this wreck risky. The "Straubenzie" is also known as the "Ten Volt" or "Yawl Boat Wreck" and is a three-masted barquentine that sank in 200' of water in 1909 after a collision with a steamer during the night. All four crew perished in the collision.

We were in luck and the weather remained calm for the hour long ride out to the site. Upon suiting up and descending the mooring line it was discovered surface visibility was good at 15'-20' of viz, but strangely there was a murk layer of only 3'-5' of viz from about 60'-120'. Below this it was pitch black but with excellent visibility of an estimated 50'-100'. A strong canister light was required to see anything, but visibility was as far as the light could penetrate. Ambient light was visible down to about 90'. No thermocline was present. Instead the surface temperature was 70 deg F, and a steady decline in temperature was evident down to the murk layer, where 38 deg F water was located below it. At the 20' deco stop, a mild SW current was also evident.

The mooring is attached to the stern of the wreck on the starboard side at the lifeboat davit. Immediately evident at the stern is a large metal wheel in good condition with the steering gear visible behind it. Unfortunately, the wreck is silted to the point where the rudder and undersides of the ship cannot be seen. However, when viewed from behind, it can be seen that the transom contains two vertical 3'x3' doorways, one on each extreme side. This is a unique feature not seen on other wooden sailing ships. The openings seem to lead either to the main deck or slightly beneath it. This was hard to judge because of silt build up and deck damage. Forward of the wheel is the remains of the cabin, which has collapsed into a pile of broken boards. Within the jumbled pile of the cabin is a large upright wooden barrel, which was the crew's source of drinking water. Also visible is the remains of the aft (mizzen) mast, which is broken off after about 5'.

Leaning up against the port side of the ship adjacent to the cabin is the remains of the ship's yawl boat, a unique and rare feature. Yawl boats were usually lost and ended up nowhere near the wrecks. The yawl is turned so that its keel points away from the ship, and its bow is buried in the bottom. The stern, however, leans up against the port gunwale and sticks up several feet. The remains of its small rudder can still be seen. Several planks are missing along the yawl's bottom, allowing one to look into it at various points along its length and see its ribs and structure.

The ship is broken into two pieces, probably as the result of the collision, and there is at least a 30' gap between the stern section and the bow section with a mostly clear bottom in between. The sides can be seen split outwards at this gap. The bow section is in much better shape than the stern section. The cargo hold at the bow is easily accessible, and penetration is possible with a large overhead clearance. The centerboard winch can be seen lying on its side on the bottom in the gap on the port side. It appears as a box-like structure with the gears visible inside it. The middle (main) mast has fallen diagonally across the bow with its base on the bottom on the starboard side and its top resting against the port railing pointing up. This fallen mast's topmast is still attached. The forward (fore) mast at the extreme bow of the ship is still standing, complete with a fife rail and belaying pins around it. The remains of the hand pump can be seen behind it. Looking up, the fore mast was standing to above where it could no longer be seen because of the dark conditions.

The bow's deck has a fairly modern looking windlass with one large geared wheel and some other associated machinery. The opening to the chain locker is visible forward of the windlass, and it can be seen going down into the below decks area. The large starboard anchor is in place and hanging by one fluke from the gunwale, but the port anchor was not seen. There is also a tangle of wire rigging on the bow deck, and heavy silting is evident on the deck. The bowsprit is collapsed downwards, and balanced on it at the deck level is found the ship's bell, which has been cleaned of zebra mussels and placed there for all to see. The bell is of a plain design and made out of steel or iron, and it is yet another highlight of this interesting wreck. The "Straubenzie" contains so many rare sights that it is strongly recommended for those that can safely reach it.

Maximum depth was 196', bottom time was 20 minutes, and total run time was 58 minutes. 20/35 trimix was used with 50% and 100% deco mixes.