

On Friday, August 15, 2003, Kevin Magee drove up to Rogers City, MI, to join Dean Ziegler and Greg Millinger to dive some of the spectacular wrecks of Lake Huron. Darkness, chaos, and confusion had gripped the land the previous night, and Kevin was following the maxim: "If there's trouble, leave town and go diving!" It made getting gasoline, air fills, and gear repairs hard before leaving, but everyone eventually succeeded in making it past Detroit to upper Michigan, where the blackout's effects were minimal.

Diving in this area takes some logistical planning. Dean provided his trailered 24' Sportcraft boat "Ziggy II" to allow access to the dive sites. It was put in the water at the public boat ramps each morning at Rogers City or Presque Isle depending on the wrecks visited. Charter services in this area are rare, and rarely are any other divers seen at all. Greg arranged for gases (helium and oxygen) to be shipped to a nearby auto shop. Camping is the preferred means of lodging due to expense, rarity of hotels, and to allow gas mixing to be done in the evening. Air top offs had to be obtained in Alpena at Thunder Bay 30 miles to the south because the compressor at the dive shop in Rogers City was broken. The typical routine was to have multiple sets of doubles and stage bottles mixed so that gas blending was only necessary once every few days.

But the trouble is worth it. The wrecks are absolutely spectacular and very pristine. All sit high off the bottom by 15'-30' with almost no silting evident. A few small gobies were seen for the first time this year, and some small, sparse zebra mussels are evident on the shallower wrecks. However, the wrecks have mostly bare wood and metal, making items easy to examine and identify. Original paint and caulking are also not unusual on these wrecks. Bottom temperatures were 38-40 deg F with the thermocline typically found at 50'-60' with 70-73 deg F water above it. On some days, however, the thermocline was found at 30'-40'. Visibility was above average for the whole trip with 30'-40' on the bottom and surface, making for some great diving.

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On Saturday, August 16, Suzanne Camden and Mike Barrera arrived after a long night's drive. Everyone boarded the boat at Rogers City and proceeded to the "F. T. Barney," a 2-masted wooden schooner that sank in 160' of water in 1868 after colliding with another schooner. Upon arriving at the site, a boat from Abyss Dive Charters had already tied up to the wreck's mooring, and they graciously allowed Dean to tie off to their stern. This is the first charter boat Kevin had ever seen in the area, and they had apparently brought their boat from another area to specially dive the "Barney." Later, upon surfacing, another charter boat operated by local diver Thadius Bedford was found tied off to the back of Dean's boat, making it a record for the most dive boats ever seen in this area. It looks like word on these wrecks is beginning to get out.

The mooring is tied to the windlass at the bow (W), and the deck is at 145'. The bowsprit is attached and has a very long jib boom with pulleys hanging from it at various points along its length, making for an impressive sight. The port anchor and its cathead have broken loose from the railing and are hung up against the bowsprit. The starboard anchor, however, is still chained and hanging from its cathead on the railing. A companionway with a sheltered roof over the top is immediately behind the windlass with steps going down below decks. Behind it the front mast is broken off at its base. Excellent 50' viz with ambient light conditions was present, and the mast could be seen lying out in the debris field on the port side along with many other miscellaneous parts.

Behind the mast stub on the centerline is a winch and one of three cargo openings. The cargo hatches are smashed but still partly in place on the openings. Inside can be seen the remains of its coal cargo. All remaining deck equipment has slid/fallen to the starboard railing, including a pile of chain from the windlass, the capstan - leaving its base plate behind on the centerline, and the second centerboard winch with chain coming out of the centerline hole and trailing over across the deck to the fallen winch. Three shovels were seen along the railing along with various blocks and mast parts scattered on the deck. It appears the ship listed heavily to starboard when sinking before coming to rest on an even keel on the bottom.

At the stern the rear mast is standing, and it supposedly has a crow's nest at the top, although it could not be seen from the deck. The rear mast's boom has fallen over the railing to the starboard side. The cabin is completely intact with a hand pump just forward of it and a companionway into the cabin on the port side. On the roof near the companionway is the exhaust for the stove with a protective metal cage over it. Inside the cabin are the scattered remains of furniture, some dishes, two rooms on the port side, and a small room on the starboard side. The doors are collapsed or ajar with porcelain doorknobs, and window openings are present along both sides of the cabin. A companionway exits at the middle stern, and the wheel is present on the steering deck with an opening on the deck at the foot of the helmsman. Two lifeboat davits are at the extreme corners of the stern. On the back wall of the cabin next to the companionway is a strange box that appears to have allowed passing things through to the helmsman without opening the cabin door. Resting inside the box has been placed the ship's compass!

Traveling back along the starboard side, a large Navy-style anchor was seen on the bottom with its shank broken off and a large hole in the side of the wreck. This anchor is out of place and comes from a much later time period. There are two stories connected with it: one is that it is from a laker that accidentally snagged the wreck before it was discovered. The other is that it was from a Michigan/NOAA ship that came to survey the wreck soon after it was discovered and accidentally snagged the wreck and toppled the forward mast. It is hard to say which is the truth. Finally, laying on the bottom a little forward of the anchor

is a brass navigation lantern. It is very large, sits upright on the bottom, and appears completely undamaged with a green lens installed. This was the perfect end to a magnificent dive. Bottom time was 15 minutes, total run time was 33 minutes, and 25/20 trimix was used with 100% O2 for decompression.

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Sunday, August 17, was almost a blow day. 4'-6' swells and choppy waves made the day too rough, but the lake began to lie down at about 3 PM just as Suzanne and Mike left to go home. So, Dean, Greg, and Kevin went out of Presque Isle to dive the "Florida." This wreck was a wooden package steamer that sank in 200' of water in 1897 after being struck by another steamer. The seas were choppy with 2'-3' swells, but they were tolerable, and the seas were only 1'-2' glassy swells by the time the diving was done.

The wreck's bow is SW, and the mooring is tied to one of three metal anchors with folding flukes that lie on the deck at the extreme bow. The bow stand high off the bottom with the deck at 170'. Visibility was a spectacular 40'-60' with ambient light conditions, and looking down the sides revealed a massive wall of wood going down to a distant debris-scattered bottom. Two rub rails were evident along with various side doors for loading cargo. On the bow stem was a small standing flagpole with a disk-shaped cap. There are also two decorative metal globes on the bow and a bow-pointing pole pointed outwards but slightly fallen down towards the bottom. Immediately behind the anchors are two chain locker openings with weird crescent sliding covers. Present at the bow is a large capstan with a large shiny brass cover that reads "SS Florida, 1899" and the name of the owners and builders. Some fallen air scoops lie on the deck, and several metal radiators stand out from the deck. Careful examination revealed the outline of a now-gone deckhouse with cabins where the radiators are located.

Moving aft, various large cargo openings are found with two or three fallen wooden masts on the deck. Early steamers had masts to supplement the engines and provide a backup. The masts' rigging and various bracing platforms are easily viewed. A fallen flagpole was found with a metal ball at its tip, and a long metal tray with cutouts for lanterns was also found. Inside the cargo holds were seen all sorts of general package goods. Found were barrels of flour - some collapsed with just the staves and hoops, some intact sitting on the floor, some floating up against the ceiling or masts across the hatches, and some partially collapsed with a solid white pasty cylinder of flour remaining. Also seen inside the cargo holds were hand trucks, stacked wash tubs and dishes, crates of blue-and-white enameled metal coffee pots, stacked paint cans, and a plethora of other goods and crates.

Moving amidships, a partially intact wooden deckhouse was found. One large room with a fallen wall has a potbelly stove and collapsed benches and tables inside. An adjoining room is full of lanterns, some intact and some busted on the

floor. Shelves with cutouts for the lanterns line the walls. The room next to it is filled with stacked paint cans with the paper labels still somewhat evident. Moving aft, the impact point of the other steamer can be seen on the starboard side. A large wedge-shaped hole exists that extends to the bottom and opens up the interior for viewing. Just aft of this point is a metal deckhouse that contains two large boilers inside. On the deck on the starboard side lies a brass gauge. The top of the deckhouse reveals the holes for two side-by-side smokestacks.

Right after this point, the wreck suddenly ends. The hull appears to have been cut with a knife, exposing all three deck levels and their interiors. On the bottom can be seen the outline of the rounded stern, and in the middle stands the large engine. On top of the engine has been paced a second capstan cover that looks just like the first one. On the starboard side of the engine are mounted five brass gauges, some half-filled with fluid but all still readable. A whistle can be seen lying among the jumbled machinery debris on the bottom. One stack was seen to the starboard side and one on the port side. A large metal dumpster filled with coal can be seen aft of the engine, and the rudder post pushes up through the debris at the extreme stern. Swimming around the stern, the rudder can be seen turned hard to port, and a single blade of the propeller can be seen pushing up through the bottom behind it. The stern is extremely undercut, and depths of greater than 200' may be possible in this area.

During the time on the wreck, several large freighters went by at a distance of less than a half mile, indicating that the "Florida" is still in the active shipping lanes today. Bottom time was 20 minutes, total run time was 59 minutes, and 20/35 trimix was used with 50% nitrox and 100% O<sub>2</sub> for decompression.

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On Monday, August 18, Greg had left, but Dean and Kevin were joined by Joyce Hayward. They decided to dive the "F. T. Barney" again for Joyce's benefit so she could obtain some photos of it. The day was glassy flat at the beginning, but by the end of the day the wind had picked up, and 2' seas were building. Bottom time was 20 minutes, total run time was 50 minutes, and 25/20 trimix was used with 100% O<sub>2</sub> for decompression.

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On Tuesday, August 19, Dean and Kevin decided to dive the "Defiance." The "Defiance" was a 2-masted schooner that sank in 180' of water in 1854 after striking another schooner, the "Audubon." Joyce watched the boat and later dove the "Windiate" one last time to recover the baseline reel from the previous week's archeological study (see previous dive report).

The mooring for the "Defiance" is tied to the top of the rear mast, which starts at 100' depth. The topmast is missing, but the crosstrees and mast step are in

place. Hanging from the top of the mast are three large wooden blocks, which are very impressive. Moving down the mast, the stern points N. This is an early vessel because it has no cabin and is tiller steered with no wheel. In place of the cabin is a small roofed companionway with stairs that lead below decks. It would be an extremely tight entry. Aft of this is an opening at the helmsman's feet with a skylight cover resting next to it. The tiller is large and impressive. Even more impressive, it moves when pushed. Looking over the transom to the bottom, the rudder can also be seen to move and sweeps out a full arc of travel! This is the only vessel Kevin has ever seen underwater that has completely intact and functional steering mechanisms, especially one that is 150 years old.

Visibility was good at 30'-40' with ambient light conditions, and the bottom and debris field could easily be seen from the deck at 170' depth. Nearby lying on the bottom were several very large boulders around the wreck. It's a good thing the wreck didn't land on any of these when it sank. Moving forward, the capstan was seen along with a hand pump, capstan, two cargo hatches, two winches, and the standing forward mast. In the center of the wreck stands a large rectangular stove with cooking pots and dishes scattered around it. One of the pots is filled with coal. The remains of a sheltering roof, corner posts, and maybe a single wall are also lying next to the stove, indicating that cooking was done in the middle of the deck out in the open. Lying on the deck are various mast parts, including one curious spar with a disk-shaped cap carved into it. The stern mast boom overhangs the transom on the port side and also has a series of curious serrated notches carved into its end.

The bow is blunt and fairly rounded. It also stands high off the bottom, and the underside curvature can easily be seen. The bowsprit is complete snapped off, probably from the collision. The starboard anchor is a classic wooden-stocked design hanging from the railing, but the port one is missing its stock and is lying on the deck. The windlass has its anchor chain pulled out and runs in four loops up and down the port side just like on the "Windiate." They run half the length of the deck, and then one chain length continues all the way to the stern, around the companionway, and back to the windlass along the starboard side. This further supports the conjecture that this was a standard procedure in preparation for anchoring since it is known that the "Defiance" was not trapped in ice..

Bottom time was 20 minutes, run time was 58 minutes, and 20/35 trimix was used with 50% nitrox and 100% O2 for decompression. Three large fishing lures were hooked into the mooring line at a 25' depth and trailed several feet behind in the mild current. Care had to be taken to avoid them during the dive. They were between the 30' and 20' stops, so they couldn't easily be removed while decompressing. After his deco was done, Kevin went on backgas and descended with his shears and removed the hooks. One was lost while handing them up to the boat, but the others were donated to Dean's sons.

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On Wednesday, August 20, Joyce had left, leaving just Dean and Kevin to dive alone. They again chose to dive the "Florida" and see more of this magnificent wreck. Just before arriving, a 1000'-foot laker went right over the dive site. Another freighter passed nearby while Kevin was suiting up. And during his deco, the noise from another laker became so loud that he had his backgas regular in his hand and was ready to crash dive to 60' if he saw things get mysteriously dark, saw the bow coming at him, or saw Dean's boat quickly cast off the mooring. Fortunately, that didn't happen, and upon surfacing he learned that another 1000'-foot laker had passed within 500' of the boat. Dean had also gotten on Channel 16 and called off a fourth laker behind him. The loud thump-thump-thump of the propeller was also offset by the clinking and clanking of various machinery pieces, and Kevin swears he could have heard someone sneeze in the engine room. Afterwards, Dean suited up and dove, but fortunately no more laker traffic was seen for that day. Bottom time was 20 minutes, total run time was 56 minutes, and 20/35 trimix was used with 50% nitrox and 100% O2 for decompression.

Afterward Dean's dive, they went to the "John J. Audubon," a 2-masted schooner that sank in 1854 when the "Defiance," which was dove the previous day, struck it. This wreck lies in only 170' of water with the deck at 150', making it a good second dive. Dean stayed to watch the boat, and Kevin dove the wreck. The mooring is tied to the bow, which points E. The bowsprit is missing, and there is a 1'-2' vertical split in the hull on the starboard side of the bow stem. This is probably due to the collision. A metal anchor hangs on the starboard rail, and a classic wood-stocked anchor hangs on the port side. The windlass is present, and chain is piled around the deck. Curiously, there is a three-pronged metal cage that covers the top of the square bit in front of the windlass. Its purpose is not known. Scattered all over the deck and on the bottom like match sticks are piles of railroad rails, which were its cargo. This is just like on the "Trade Wind" in Lake Erie.

Both masts are down, and many interesting mast structures, crosstrees, and parts are easily visible at deck level. One boom had a curious series of small metal rails embedded in it. The cabin is gone, but the opening remains. The rudder is hard to starboard. This wreck has a very short tiller with some wood supports mounted on the deck in front of it. Off the starboard side of the cabin hole lying on the deck is the wheel, indicating this was probably a tiller-steered ship that was later converted to a wheel. The ship's rectangular stove also lies on the deck near the wheel. Bottom time was 10 minutes, total run time was 35 minutes, and 20/35 trimix was used with 50% nitrox and 100% O2 for decompression. Overall, this was an interesting wreck, and it was the perfect way to end a week of diving the very pristine wrecks of this area of Michigan.