

On Saturday, July 17, 2004, seven (7) AquaMasters went diving in Lake Huron's Sanilac Shores Underwater Preserve off Lexington, MI. They were Mike and Georgann Wachter, Jacques Girouard, Griff Ralston, Brian Hock, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee. The boat used was Jim and Pat Stayer's charter "Wild Kat," a 29' catamaran twin-outboard that can travel at 20-30 mph to the dive site and comfortably handle 4-5 divers at a time. Because of the size of the group, Mike, Georg, Cindy and Kevin made up the morning trip, and Jacques, Brian, and Griff made up the afternoon trip with an additional local diver, Dave, to fill the boat. The seas were calm at 1' or less with clear sunny skies and warm 75 deg F air temperatures. Upon entering the water, it was discovered visibility was good at 25'-35', the surface temperature was 60 deg F, and the bottom temperature was a balmy 60 deg F with no thermocline. This made for fabulous diving conditions, and these conditions persisted for the entire weekend.

The first wreck visited was the "North Star," a 300'-long steel package freighter that sank in 90' of water in 1908 during a collision with another steamer in fog. The bow is W, and the ship lies mostly on its starboard side. The amidships area has collapsed so that the deck lies flat on the bottom, but both the extreme bow and stern sections are still intact. The mooring was tied to the top of the twin vertical pistons of its large compound engine, which stands 20'-25' off the bottom. The mechanisms underneath the engine are visible, and the bottom around the engine is littered with pieces of machinery and hull. The underside of the stern exposes the attached propeller, but the rudder is missing. On the stern's deck can be seen a single hooked davit, capstan, emergency steering arm attached to the rudder post, and a large toothed steering gear partly exposed under the deck.

Forward of the engine to the starboard (N) side are two large boilers lying side by side on the bottom. Both are impressively large, and the faces are fully exposed for easy examination. Forward of the boilers is the collapsed cargo deck with five hatch openings along its length. The holds are still partly intact under the deck, and various cargo items and debris can be seen inside. On the deck are two fallen wooden masts and two deck winches. Approximately half way down its length is a buckled portion where the decking juts upwards to form a wall. The intact bow is separated from the hull by a gap of 20'-30' and twisted slightly to the S. On the bow deck is another capstan, some bits, and a fallen stocked anchor half buried in the bottom. This wreck is large, and the swim to the bow is a challenge. However, the wreck has a lot to offer, and something new can probably be seen on every dive.

The second dive was the "Sport," a small tug that foundered in 45' of water during a 1920 storm. Although small and unassuming, it is an historic vessel because it was the first steel composite vessel in the Great Lakes when it was constructed in 1873. It is lying on its starboard side with the deck at a 60-deg angle and the bow pointing W. The mooring is tied to the sturdy wood railing at the stern 15' off the bottom, and because of the shallow depth it is reached almost immediately upon descending. The cabin is missing, but the hull, deck,

and engine machinery are completely intact. The engine is exposed amidships with working levers, valves, and knobs. A small boiler lies perpendicular forward of the engine. Forward of this is a small tank below deck and then a bulkhead with a small doorway that leads to the forward spaces. The wooden decks are unbroken, and various round and square openings in the deck allow peeking into the silt-filled interior. The deck itself contains cleats and bits in several places.

Examining the wreck's perimeter, a shovel and steam whistle can be seen lying on the starboard bow railing, and nearby are twin metal steering wheels sitting upright on the bottom in their supporting base. The starboard railing is also littered with various miscellaneous pieces of equipment and covers. Moving to the underside of the ship at the stern, the rudder can be seen to be attached but askew, and the four-bladed propeller is broken off and lying on the bottom. One of the blades of the propeller is sheared off and lying next to the propeller. A historic sign marker is off the wreck near the propeller, but the sign is missing, leaving only the concrete base and pole remaining. This is a small wreck that is quickly circled in just a few minutes, but a lot of little details can be examined if one stops and looks. The fish life was also fairly abundant, a rarity among most Great Lakes wrecks.

After the afternoon trip, Jim and Pat held a cookout for everyone at their house with burgers and brauts. Mike and Georg graciously bought extra food like potato salad, cole slaw, and other good things to eat. Everyone ate until stuffed, then lounged around talking diving for the rest of the evening.

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On Sunday, July 18, 2004, the weather started out ominously with 2'-3' choppy seas, a steady wind, gray overcast skies, and cool 65-70 deg F air temperatures. However, this quickly changed to less than 1' seas, sunny skies, and hot 75-80 deg F air temperatures by the end of the day, making for another set of perfect dives. Griff also changed from the afternoon trip to the morning trip, and another local diver was added to the afternoon trip.

The first wreck visited was the "Mary Alice B," a modern steel tug that sank in 1975 in 85' of water after springing a leak. A strong NW current was discovered on this wreck, and upon descending the bow was found to be pointed S with the mooring tied to the bow. There is a large winch on the bow with a chain locker opening behind it and a rope coming out of it. This rope leads to the tug's small navy-style anchor lying on the bottom off the port bow. The name of the boat is painted in white letters on both sides of the bow with the hull painted black. Bumpers and rubber tires are in place around the perimeter of the ship. Immediately obvious at the front of the ship is the wheelhouse with its large steering wheel inside. The wheelhouse is easily entered, and along the back

wall can be seen various control boxes and wooden shelves. Moving along the port side, a small companionway is first encountered with steps leading down below. This was an extremely tight fit and was not explored. Continuing aft, another door is found that contains the toilet and a sink. Rounding the corner of the cabin at the stern, the entrance to the engine room is found. This can be entered with caution and explored. This is made easier because the skylight cover above the engine is missing and lying on the bottom off the starboard side. This allows easier access and makes both sides of the engine easily examined.

Along the starboard side of the cabin is a single door with the kitchen inside. It contains a stove, seats, small counter surface, cabinets, and sink. Visible resting on various surfaces are silverware, a ladle, and a pot. On top of the cabin is a standing smokestack. Nearby is a tall metal mast with climbing poles sticking out of its sides. A small lifting crane is on the port side, and another small mast is on top of the wheelhouse. Also on top of the wheelhouse are a radar dish, searchlight, and running light mounts. On the stern deck was found a pair of bits, removable ladder, and a boat hook. The transom has "Detroit" painted on it in white letters, and underneath the stern can be seen the propeller and rudder. The bottom, like most Lake Huron wrecks, is very firm and allows all wrecks to sit high off the bottom without sinking into it. In comparison, most tug wrecks in Lake Erie are sunken up to their gunwales in silt.

The second wreck was the "Regina," a steel package steamer that sank in the infamous storm of 1913 and was missing until found in 1986. It is almost upside down in 75' of water with the bow N. The starboard side is slightly exposed to the E, and the wreck stands high off the bottom by about 20'-25'. The mooring was tied to the stern where there is an impressive propeller and rudder. Descending to the fantail, the name "Regina" can be seen in raised letters along the transom. Part of the stern cabin can be seen with railings, portholes, and a single doorway leading into the engine room. Entering the door and carefully moving forward, the engine spaces can be examined. The bottom is littered with debris, but hanging is an electrical panel with throw switches and sockets. Further inside near the engine can also be found a gauge panel with four brass gauges. However, extensive penetration and exploration was not done due to the lack of redundant equipment. Exiting and moving forward, several bottles were found on the bottom along with a piece of china. The large smokestack lies perpendicular to the wreck and is not collapsed or damaged in any way. Piping runs along the outside of it, and the smokestack can be swum through.

Amidships the hull is partially collapsed with a big tear on the E side, allowing easy entrance into the cavernous holds of the ship in either direction. This is easy to penetrate with plenty of clearance and many exits visible under the gunwale. The bottom is again littered with debris and hull pieces. On the outside towards the bow were exposed several wooden crates with canned goods still stacked inside. The labels of the cans were unreadable, and the cans were fairly rusted. However, the wooden crates had writing on them and were in good

shape. It was noticed that elaborate dovetail joints were used on some crate pieces. At the extreme bow was seen a row of portholes with the glass still intact and more raised letters spelling "Regina." On the bottom was found a shoe with two rows of cobbling nails on the sole. The anchor chain extends from the port hawse pipe and extends far out into the debris field. From this evidence it is surmised that the "Regina" was at anchor and probably dragging when it was ripped in half and sank in the ferocious storm that also sank many other ships on that day.

Overall, a great time was had by all. Jim and Pat were excellent hosts, and the weather, visibility, and water temperatures were fabulous. The wrecks were also great with good preservation and much to see and explore. We are all now looking forward to returning sometime soon!