

On Saturday, September 18, 2004, a group of people from both the Bay Area Divers (BAD) and Lake Erie Wreck Divers (LEWD) met in Tobermory, Ontario. Tobermory is at the tip of the Bruce Peninsula, which lies between Lake Huron and the Georgian Bay. It is the location of the Fathom Five National Marine Park, which is famous for its wrecks, water clarity, and cold water. The peninsula itself is remote, and the drive takes about 9-10 hours from Cleveland, OH. Therefore, most people left Friday morning to make the long drive and to be ready Saturday morning. This trip was made possible thanks to Joyce Hayward, who arranged the details as part of BAD's semi-annual trip to this location. We used G+S Charters and stayed at Trails End Lodge, which has wonderful accommodations facing the lake with a boardwalk down to the beautiful rocky shore. The boat was the "W.A. Spears," a large 58' steel-hulled former fishing tug that easily and comfortably handled the twenty divers. Captain Steve was at the helm. The LEWD divers were Georgann and Mike Wachter, Greg Ondus, Ann Stephenson, KB Sporck, Ted Green, George Balas, Gary Humel, Marty Leonard, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee.

Saturday's weather dawned with a sunny blue sky, 2' seas, and cool 55 deg F air temperature. The first dive was on the famous "Arabia," a three-masted barque that sank in 105' 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 at the bottom of the mooring line, a concrete block was found with a 75'-100' swim along a secondary line to the wreck. The mooring's secondary line was attached to the tip of the mizzen mast, which has fallen off the stern to the south of the wreck. The bow points N. Ambient lighting conditions were present on the bottom along with excellent 30'-40' visibility and a warm 53 deg F bottom temperature. The surface water temperature was an even warmer 60 deg F, but there was no perceptible thermocline. The ship's hull is intact and stands about 10'-15' off the bottom. However, the decking is missing along most of the ship's length with everything collapsed into the interior. The stern's transom and steering deck are ripped off and laying up against the wreck on the starboard side. Lying on the bottom next to this section is the ship's metal wheel with some attached steering gear. A plaque next to the wheel identifies the "Arabia." The rudder post and rudder stick out from this steering deck and lie on the bottom behind the ship. The underside lines of the ship and the built-up keel are easily examined because of the missing transom section. Inside the wreck is the collapsed cabin floor. An upside down rectangular stove can be found on the starboard side. Amidships is the standing centerboard box with the fallen centerboard winch lying at the port side of the box. A chain runs from the winch into the box. On the starboard side of the centerboard box is the capstan still attached to a section of decking and leaned sideways against the box. The bottom of the ship is littered with miscellaneous wooden parts, ship's knees, decking, blocks, gaffs, and booms.

At the bow the forecastle deck is intact and can be swum underneath. Anchor chains hang down into this chain locker area from above. A hand pump can be

seen lying on the bottom at the bow, and the pump's attachment point can be seen above on the forecastle deck. Forward is a square bit whose base goes all the way down to the keel. A small chain locker opening is forward of the bit, and it has two small cap-covered holes with one on each side. The anchor chains run down into these holes underneath the caps, and this is an unusual feature that somewhat resembles modern recreational boats. A windlass is mounted to the forecastle deck ahead of the chain locker openings, and the bowsprit and jib boom are intact and extend 15'-20' ahead of the ship. Several bracing chains run from the bowsprit to the bow stem. Both anchors - classic wooden stocked designs - are hanging from the railings attached to their catheads with their chains going into the hawse pipes. Leaning against the port railing is the fallen mainmast with its crosstrees easily examined at deck level. The railings also contain deadeyes, chain plates, and belaying pin boards, although all belaying pins are missing. It can be seen why this wreck is so dangerous. Many people shortened their dives to be able to make the long swim back along the bottom at maximum depth to the mooring block. 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, although at least one person surfaced on the bow's mooring instead of the stern due to a low air situation.

The second wreck was the "James C. King," a wooden schooner-barge that sank after its tow, the steamer "Wetmore," was driven ashore in a Nov, 1901, storm. The wreck lies with the stern at about a 20' depth and the bow at about 80'-90' depth. In between is a steep rocky slope with the wreck badly broken up and pointing straight down the slope. The mooring is tied in the shallows near the stern. Visibility was a descent 30', and the water temperature was a warm 60-63 deg F. The hull is flattened with ribs and planking visible. Upon descending down its length, however, it was discovered that a "scuz-o-cline" existed at 70' where the visibility suddenly went to 1'-2' of viz. Several people blindly followed the broken wreck pieces down, but not much was seen beyond a capstan somewhere near the bottom. In the shallows off to one side is another significant portion of the wreck with the rudder visible. A hawse pipe was also found on one rocky ledge off to one side of the wreck.

The third wreck was the "W.L. Wetmore," the wooden steamer that was towing the "King" and lies very close nearby. However, they are separated by a long submerged rocky point that requires a significant boat trip around. The wreck 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. The mooring is about 75'-100' from the stern and requires a significant swim towards shore to find the wreck. First encountered is a small portion of the stern structure with a four-bladed propeller attached. Three of its blades have been sheared off with only the fourth blade remaining. The huge wooden rudder is lying flat on the bottom nearby with steering quadrant linkages still attached to the rudder post. Pieces of wooden hull, piping, valves, and engine room parts are scattered all over the bottom in this area. The propeller shaft runs to the base of the engine. The

engine itself is missing with its mounting feet sheared off, probably from salvage. In front of it is a huge 10'-15' diameter boiler standing upright on one end with a smaller auxiliary water tank hanging off its side. The top of the boiler is only a few feet below the water's surface.

Swimming towards the bow, quite a bit of the flattened wooden structure can be seen. Large rafts of wood that were once the sides and bottom of the ship lie in this area. At the bow is a large wood-stocked anchor on the bottom. Attached to it is a chain that threads itself along the rocky bottom and through a hawse pipe and another metal fitting before terminating in a large chain 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" and "BAD" on a flat metal plate nearby. Visibility was great at 30'-40', and the water temperature was balmy at 60-63 deg F. The day's air temperature had also warmed up significantly to 60-65 deg F, and the seas had calmed to less than 1'.

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 75'-100' swim was required to reach the site from the mooring, but the deck is only 5' 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 its sides 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 to port. The three hatches and cabin opening 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 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.

Sticking partially above water 100' away from the "Sweepstakes" close to shore can be seen the remains of the "City of Grand Rapids," a wooden steamer that burned and sank in the harbor in 1907. It was explored as well. It is in only 3'-8' of water and consists of a mostly buried and broken up wooden hull with the bow's curved keel still visible at the N end and the propeller hole in the stern at the S end. A metal boiler cradle and engine mounts lie inside the hull near the stern. The ship lies partly listing to starboard, so the port side is mostly visible.

Afterwards, we had finally had enough diving. So, we entered Little Tub Harbor, unloaded, cleaned ourselves up, and attended a pre-dinner wine and cheese party at Trails End. Afterwards, we attended a buffet dinner that Joyce Hayward arranged at the Tobermory Lodge. KB entertain everyone with his guitar and singing of sea chanties, and it would appear everyone had a good time. Eventually, however, we had to head off to bed to get some sleep for the next day's diving.

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On Sunday, September 19, 2004, everyone again headed to the boat for some more great diving. The LEWD divers lost Marty Leonard but gained Nancy Miller. The air temperature was colder at 50-55 deg F, but the seas were calmer at 1' or less. Both dives were on the "Niagara II," a sand sucker that was purposely sunk upright in 90' of water in 1999 for use by divers. It is 180' long, and it is a large wreck with much to explore and see. The mooring was tied to the stern, which points S. Greeting divers upon descent is a Canadian flag flying from the stern flag pole. The deck is at 70', and the transom has "Niagara II, Tobermory" painted on it. Dropping to the bottom underneath the curved, undercut stern reveals the rudder, but the propeller is missing. On the deck level, the stern deckhouse contains the crew's mess with cabinets and counter tops inside. Decoratively arranged plates and coffee mugs have been left by divers inside the cabinets, making for a nice display. Swimming forward along both sides of the ship reveals a series of single rooms for the crew's quarters. All the rooms have wood paneling on the walls, most still intact but some collapsed. These rooms contain built-in cabinets, bunk beds, sinks, showers, and/or toilets and are fun to enter and explore. On top of the deckhouse is the roof of the engine room with skylights and several large openings. Entry into the engine room is easy, and both levels can be explored. The top level has ladders and a grated floor. The bottom level has two large concrete slabs instead of the engines, which were removed. However, engine controls, pipes, valves, and other equipment were left in place, making for interesting exploration. The engine room can be exited by swimming straight up through the large single smokestack in the center of the engine room. What appears to be three steam whistles are behind the smokestack, and there are many large air scoops on the roof. Two sets of lifeboat davits are on top of the engine room, and two still have blocks hanging from the ends of them. There are also two small, separate rooms on the stern engine room roof with closed doors. Opening the doors reveals a desk or beds inside the rooms.

On top of the deckhouse forward of the engine room are a couple more rooms placed together. The starboard room contains a safe that can be opened, but no gold or treasure was found inside. On top of these rooms is the bridge with a radar display, throttle, working wheel, and a beer mug so you can drink and sing pirate chanties while you drive the ship. There is a radar and antennae mast on top of the pilot house, and "Niagara II, Tobermory" is painted on the front of the

pilot house. Forward of the deckhouse is the sand sucking boom and the large enclosed cargo space where the sand was stored. The roof of this space is easily penetrated, and inside is a cavernous hold with some winches and chains hanging from the ceiling. Several openings have been cut into the sides of the hull, revealing the double-hulled construction of the ship with spaces that can be explored down both sides of the ship. There are also openings out into open water within this space. The front of the cargo hold contains a sharply inclined ramp that leads back up to the deck level. There is a bow house with a winch on top of it. Working levers and controls for the sand boom are on the starboard side, and there are gauges and dials at this station as well. Inside the bow house is a former machine shop with side rooms containing tool bins, gears, workbenches, and other interesting things. The chain locker is in the forward part of this area.

Going over the side of the ship, a toilet can be seen on the bottom off the bow's port side. The port anchor is missing, but the starboard anchor chain is deployed and goes out to a concrete block some distance away from the wreck. Additional chains snake around on the bottom on this side, and a fallen boom can be seen lying on the bottom, too. The starboard side of the bow is wrinkled and damaged from the impact with the bottom, and a tear can be seen in the hull's skin. An opening into the inner hull is also in this area. Overall, the "Niagara II" is one of the best artificial wrecks around. It has many passages and openings cut into it, but they are not too large or numerous. They allow interesting navigation challenges to all levels of divers. It is also refreshing to see that so much furniture, dishes, and original ship equipment was left in place for the sinking. The "Niagara II" is a wealth of little details to explore and have fun with. Having dove other artificial wrecks, some are stripped completely bare of all items, leaving only barren, empty rooms with excessively big and numerous holes in them. After diving the ship twice, there are still places to explore on this ship. Visibility was an excellent 30'-40', and the water temperatures were 55 deg F on the bottom and 63 deg F above.

Afterwards, everyone packed up and headed home by 2-3 PM. The long drive had most people arriving back home at about midnight, but the diving made it worthwhile. Everyone had a great time in Tobermory, and we all hope to do it again!