

CLUE, 2005-06-18 - "Barge F" Dive Report

Early Saturday morning on June 18, 2005, Cindy LaRosa and Kevin Magee arrived at the dock in Barcelona, NY, to do some diving in Lake Erie. At the dock was Captain Jim Herbert, deckhand Mike, and the 50' aluminum crew boat "Southwind" of Osprey Charters. Joining them soon afterwards were divers Jack Papes, Greg Ondus, Jacques Girouard, Ed Staley, Scott, and several of Ed's students, making a total of 10 divers. The weather was a pleasant 68 deg F with partly sunny skies and calm 1'-2' seas. The lake had been storming for the last few days, however, and the harbor water was green-brown, which was not encouraging.

For Cindy and Kevin this was the first dive with Osprey this year, so we examined the many improvements Jim and Mike had made to the boat over the winter. Of course, there are the fabled twice-installed new engines, which now allow water skiing as post-dive entertainment. The exhaust pipes are large enough to crawl up inside. Other improvements were also evident. The dive deck's benches have a rubber rail installed to prevent the bottom of tanks from kicking out during rough weather, a not uncommon occurrence in the past. The interior seats have all been re-arranged to allow much more space below decks, which makes gearing up much more comfortable. Finally, the electrical system of the boat has been completely upgraded, and a shore power hookup added. Overall, the changes look great and make diving off this boat even more enjoyable.

The dive site was "Barge F," an unidentified wooden wreck that sank in 145' of water about 10 miles offshore. Originally, it was discovered by Garry Kozak in the early 1980's during his long search for the supposed treasure ship "Dean Richmond." However, because it was obviously not the "Dean," he never dove it and kept going. On Wednesday, August 1, 2001, the wreck was re-located by Jim Herbert, David VanZandt, and Kevin Magee using rough GPS-converted LORAN coordinates provided by Garry. It was discovered 3/4 mile away from the converted coordinates, and on Sunday, August 5, 2001, it was dove for the first time and discovered to be a virgin wreck. This is considered the first wreck found by CLUE (see below), but it has remained unidentified despite efforts to find tonnage numbers, a name, or other identifiers. The purpose of the dive for Cindy and Kevin was to obtain accurate measurements of the wreck's dimensions to hopefully allow researchers to identify this wreck.

Because of the new engines, the normally 45-minute trip only took 30 minutes. There is one disadvantage to the faster engines - there is not enough time to sleep on the way out to the dive site. Upon arriving, the mooring needed to be raised for the season, so Greg Ondus and Jack Papes volunteered to dive a shot line and send up the mooring for everyone else. This they did efficiently, and everyone else geared up to go in. Unlike the near shore waters, surface visibility was clear at 40'-50', and a 65 deg F surface temperature was noted. Upon

descending a thermocline was found at 30', and below this was a reduction in visibility to just 5'-10'. However at about a 70'-80' depth the visibility suddenly increased to 60'-80' with 39-40 deg F water on the bottom and bright ambient lighting conditions.

The mooring is attached near the bow, which points exactly north. At the extreme bow is a small notch cut into the stem, probably for the towrope. No cable is evident, and immediately behind the stem is a large tow bit, or samson post, to which the towrope would have been attached. The bow is somewhat schooner-shaped but more blunt. Overall, the entire ship looks somewhat like a schooner but with a more utilitarian style of construction. There is no evidence of sail or steam propulsion, and it is assumed to have been a barge with a ship-like style of construction. Immediately behind the samson post is a large windlass. A chain locker opening is evident on the deck to the port side of the windlass. On the starboard side is an anchor lying flat on the deck with a folded or missing stock. A hand pump with one remaining handle is offset to the starboard side behind the windlass. Unnoticed in previous dives is the fact that immediately behind the windlass and pump is a separate deck winch of equal size to the windlass. This is where the mooring is tied, and it lies close enough to the windlass that on quick glance it appears to be one structure. It is unusual to have such a large winch so close to the windlass, and its exact purpose is unclear. Lying on the deck on the port side of the winch is another anchor standing on its metal stock with its flukes lying flat on the deck.

Immediately behind the winch begins a large continuous cargo opening that covers approximately a third of the ship's length. It is divided into five discrete sections by simple beams running across the width of the opening. The second section from the stern is further divided by a beam running down the centerline along the length of the ship. The other sections appear to have notches that could have held similar lengthwise beams. The hold is silted almost completely full, but peeking out of the silt can be found large chunks of coal, its cargo. On both sides of the cargo opening is decking about 10' wide with occasional twin sets of bits along the gunwales.

Aft of the cargo opening is a large uncluttered deck with a moderately sized capstan on the centerline. Offset to the starboard side is another hand pump with one remaining handle, and it is a virtual twin to the first pump in size and placement. Nearby on the centerline sticking out of the deck is a small vertical pipe bent over to the starboard side halfway up its length. A moderately sized deck opening is found in the center of the deck, and further aft and offset to the port side is a slightly smaller companionway with stairs leading down and some debris visible sticking out of the silt on the bottom. Immediately behind this companionway on the extreme stern is a beautiful wheel with eight spokes. The wheel is undamaged except for three missing handles on the port side, and the steering gear is exposed and intact behind it. The deck stands about 8' off the bottom at the stern, and visible underneath can be seen the V-shaped underside

lines of the hull and the rudder, which is turned hard to port. The stern is nicely rounded in shape, sharply undercut down to the rudder, and has graceful lines for a barge.

The ship overall appears to be in excellent condition with no damage visible to the hull, decking, or equipment. A gunwale that stands about a foot high frames the full perimeter of the ship, and there is no evidence of a railing. The hull stands high off the bottom at the stern but only 3'-5' off the bottom amidships and maybe 1'-2' off the bottom at the bow. Bottom time was 20 minutes, total run time was 39 minutes, 25/20 trimix was used with 100% O₂, and a maximum depth of 144' was achieved.

The ship measured 137' +0'/-7' in length with a 30' +0'/-2' beam. A detailed scale plan view will be created and released soon with all the dimensions. An isometric sketch will also be produced at a later time. Hopefully, this information will be useful in finally identifying this wreck so its full history and story can finally be told. For those who are interested, Jack Papes has posted a set of photos, a video, and a rough sketch on his web site at the following address.

http://www.n2junkie.com/barge_f.htm

About CLUE

Cleveland Underwater Explorers (CLUE) was founded by David VanZandt and Kevin Magee in 2003. The team added Chief Researcher Jim Paskert in May, 2004. Our purpose is to research, locate, and explore the shipwrecks of the Great Lakes with an emphasis on Lake Erie. The team consists of individuals experienced in archival research, Great Lakes history and ship construction, underwater survey techniques and equipment, mechanical and electrical engineering, and recreational and technical scuba diving. The team is dedicated to finding, exploring, and documenting the submerged history found on the bottom of the Great Lakes.