

It was a nice beautiful sunny day on Sunday, June 7, 2009, when Cindy LaRosa and Kevin Magee met Scott Harrison in Lorain, OH. Scott's boat "Wreck-Reation" is docked there in the Black River, and after loading the boat for the day's fun, they headed out into the lake to see what the weather was like. The seas were calm at 1'-2' with a glassy sheen to them, and the weather was hot at 75-80 deg F. It was decided to run to the "Hickory Stick," a barge and crane that sank off Avon Point in about 55' of water. The barge was being towed from Sandusky to Rocky River by the tug "Black Marlin" when the barge broke loose from its tow in a heavy storm on Saturday, November 29, 1958. No sooner had the tug started to retreat to Lorain Harbor when its engine stopped, forcing the Coast Guard to rescue the tug's crew. The "Black Marlin" was left anchored, but it was never found again after the storm and is still one of the missing wrecks of Lake Erie. Speculation is that it broke its anchor line and drifted for many miles before finally sinking.

Scott anchored into the site and then talked on the radio to Greg Ondus, who was coming from Vermilion, OH, in his boat "Pirate" to join us. He tied off to the stern of Scott's boat, and then everyone started to gear up for the dive. Surface visibility looked promising at 5'-6', and it was hoped the same visibility was below. After Cindy and Scott had entered the water, it was noticed a large boat was coming at us from the north. It was Captains Wayne Bratton and Francine Pate on the boat "Holiday," which was carrying about 16 divers from MAST (Maritime Archaeological Survey Team). They were on a fun dive and had just finished a dive on the "Morning Star." The "Hickory Stick," which is going to be this summer's archaeological survey project, was going to be their second dive and was a chance for many of them to see the wreck for the first time. Luckily, we had already hooked the wreck for them, so they anchored nearby, swam over to our boats, and used our anchor line to descend to the wreck.

Bottom visibility unfortunately turned out to be a dim 3', but it was still clear enough to navigate and see things, especially with a good light. Running a reel was mandatory to be able to navigate back to the anchor. We hooked next to a large standing truss section of the barge, which runs roughly east-west. It stands about 6'-8' high off the bottom and is roughly 20'-30' long by 5'-10' wide. It consists of vertical metal beams with cross beams and some diagonal bracing members. The visibility on top was better at 4'-5', and there are occasional small beams sticking out from the sides of the main truss. Dropping to the bottom and following wooden planks to the west, the wreck appears to quickly end. There also appears to be very little north of the truss section beyond a fallen wooden side of the barge. However, scattered to the south and east of the truss is a large jumbled collection of wood and metal parts. This scattered debris includes many interesting pieces of wreckage, including gears, machinery parts, girders, and other various structural elements. Somewhere to the south lies the crane, but it

was not found. The wreck is interesting because it appears to have been of composite construction, which includes both wood and metal. Beyond the standing truss section, which may have originally supported the crane, there is very little intact structure, making for a widely scattered site. The bottom temperature was 60 deg F with no noticeable thermocline, and a mild north current was noticed on the bottom. Max depth was 52'.

After all the divers had surfaced, the "Holiday" headed back to Lorain to drop them off, and Kevin made another quick dive on the wreck to free the anchor, which had become hopelessly ensnared in the wreck. Scott and Greg then headed to the "Craftsman," which is another barge and crane in the same area. This all-metal barge sank near the Avon Point power plant in 40' of water on Tuesday, June 3, 1958, the same year the "Hickory Stick" sank. It foundered in rough 5'-6' seas while being towed between Huron and Cleveland, almost taking the lives of its two crewmen, who were pitched into the water and rescued just in time by the Coast Guard. This wreck was surveyed by MAST several years ago and features a MAST mooring buoy, making tying up to the wreck easy. The mooring's large concrete block lies off the northeast corner of the barge, which lies roughly east-west. The wreck stands on a rock bottom, and the deck is about 6'-8' off the bottom. Excellent 8'-10' visibility was encountered on the deck, but a strong west current was also noticed, which made swimming the length of the wreck difficult from east to west. However, it was an easy drift back from west to east.

There is a large deck winch on the northeast corner of the wreck, and a matching winch - or "machinery-thingy," according to Cindy - exists on the southwest corner. Near this winch was noticed a small perch with cancerous lumps all over the top of its head. This fish hung near the winch during the entire dive, and strangely no other fish were seen on the wreck except for a few gobies. In the center of the barge is the circular turret for the crane, which rests about a hundred feet east of the wreck. Normally, there is a line that runs to the crane from the mooring block, but it was broken and missing. The deck of the barge has many small openings that open to the silted interior spaces below. Some are small cavities while others are larger rooms, but most are completely filled with silt. All of the openings are extremely small, and some have ladders. One set of openings on the south side of the turret have what appears to be levers and controls. The deck also has many bits and bollards at various locations along the sides and corners.

After surfacing, the weather was noticeably cooler at about 60-65 deg F, and the sky was overcast. The western sky was dark, and the seas had built to 2' with a gusty wind. Greg decided to return to Vermilion, and Scott decided to check out the "Alva B," a small wooden tug that sank in 15' of water near shore. However, the dark color of the

water and sky made approaching the wreck inadvisable since the boiler stands within a few feet of the surface and must be watched out for. Instead, it was decided to call it a day and head home. After putting the boat away, Scott, Cindy, and Kevin went to Jackelopes for dinner, where they were later joined by Julie Wolf. Overall, it was a fun day with some nice dives, and hopefully the visibility will start to improve soon on the deeper wrecks.