

CLUE, 2009-06-27 – *Hickory Stick* Dive Report

The Maritime Archaeological Survey Team (MAST) will be officially surveying the barge *Hickory Stick* this summer, so the Cleveland Underwater Explorers (CLUE) provided assistance this past weekend by helping with some of the preparatory work. On Saturday, June 27, 2009, the Great Lakes Historical Society archaeologist, Carrie Sowden, and MAST member Mike Mossman met CLUE members David VanZandt and Kevin Magee at Whiskey Island in Cleveland, OH. They loaded Dave's boat *Sea Dragon* and set out on the 20-mile trip to the wreck site, which is off Avon Point to the west of Cleveland. The weather was hot and sunny at 80-85 deg F, and the seas were a little rough but tolerable at 2'-3'. As they arrived at the wreck site they could see the boats *Nobody* and *Wreck-Reation* pass by on their way east to dive the *Duke Luedtke* and *Dundee*.

The first action was to perform a side scan survey of the site to obtain an idea of the wreck's basic layout and major features. After doing this, the wreck was hooked, and everyone suited up to explore the wreck. The *Hickory Stick* is a wooden barge with a crane that sank off Avon Point in about 50' of water in November, 1958, while being towed by the tug *Black Marlin*. The barge broke loose and sank in a large storm, and the tug also ran into trouble when its engine stopped, forcing the Lorain Coast Guard to rescue the crew. The tug was left anchored but was never found after the storm and is still one of the missing wrecks of Lake Erie. The water surface temperature was warm at 73 deg F with about 10' of visibility. At 30' depth there was a weak thermocline with a drop to 63-65 deg F and a decrease in visibility to about 5'-8' – still fairly good for this wreck. The ambient lighting was also quite bright, and a light was not needed.

The wreck lies roughly east-west, but the anchor was slightly off the wreck, and after a quick search the wreck was found to the south. At the center of the wreck is a large standing metal truss roughly 6'-8' tall, about 25'-35' long, and about 8'-10' wide. It is divided up into multiple cells with cross bars on the top and diagonal braces along the sides. On the south side are also several beams projecting horizontally away from the structure at the top. The purpose of this truss structure is not clear, but it could possibly be the structural core of the barge and/or may have helped support the crane. On the north side of this truss structure is a fallen wooden wall or floor with frames and planks. There is wooden flooring that runs roughly 20' to the west, but then the structure ends abruptly. There is very little to the south that could be found, but to the east is a long length of wooden structure and a flat metal frame that runs for quite some distance. Off to the sides is a large collection of motors/generator parts, tool boxes, metal frames, and miscellaneous boxes and items that are hard to identify.

Off the west end of the wreck, Kevin ran a line southwest until the crane was found about 50'-100' away. It is lying on its side and is quite large compared to the observed size of the barge. The cab rises 10' off the bottom to a depth of 40'. On the underside of the cab can be seen the pivot point and wheel bogies that lay in a circle to allow the crane to rotate. Inside the crane can be seen various gears and the main cable drum.

In front of the cab on the bottom can be seen a boiler with its fire tubes exposed. Close examination of the cab revealed it was originally painted red. The crane's boom is large at the base and stretches about 75'-100' northwest. At its end, which is in a bowl in the mud, are a three-sheaved wheel and the cable, which is buried in the mud and cannot be followed to wherever the crane bucket might be. Close examination of the boom revealed it was originally painted white.

After surfacing from the first dive, the seas were discovered to have laid down to less than 1' with a glassy sheen. The day became calm and remained that way for the rest of the day. On the second dive, visibility was discovered to have decreased to only 3'-5' with a dimness that required a light to better see the wreck. This is strange since less than two hours separated the dives, and the sun was still high in the sky. Nevertheless, Carrie and Mike laid the survey's baseline on the bottom to the north side of the standing truss structure of the barge, and Kevin and Dave retrieve the many guidelines that had been run on the first dive. After surfacing, the long trip back to port was made. As they got underway, *Figment* with Georgann & Mike Wachter and Cindy LaRosa on board was seen to be heading the other way back to Vermilion after diving the *Bay Coal Schooner*. Overall, it was a great day and a productive start to MAST's survey.