

On Saturday afternoon, July 11, 2009, thirteen people drove through a blinding rainstorm for a weekend of diving in eastern Lake Erie aboard Osprey Charter's boat "Southwind." The rain was hard and steady for over an hour before it finally abated as everyone arrived at Barcelona, NY. The divers included Bernie Atkins, Michelle Stoffan, Ed Noga, Tim & Dawnann Dykes, Glen Fisher, Jim Jones, Brian Keith, Mike & Georgann Wachter, Dave Anderson, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee. Jim Herbert captained the boat with the able help of Mike as deckhand. The weather remained overcast, but the rain stopped, and the lake had 3' seas. Conditions were not good enough to make the very long run across the lake to the originally scheduled "Crystal Wreck" and "Trade Wind," so it was decided to go to the "Boland" instead, which is just a short trip from the harbor.

The "John J. Boland" is a large 253'x43' steel freighter that foundered in 125' of water in October, 1932, after a sudden storm caught it without its hatch covers installed and excess coal loaded on its deck. The short trip between Erie, PA, and Buffalo had lulled the captain into believing securing and sealing the ship's hatches was unnecessary. Four people died from the crew of nineteen when the ship took on water through the open hatches and then suddenly rolled and sank in the rough seas. The wreck lies almost upside down but partially on its starboard side, exposing the deck and port gunwale. It was difficult to gear up on the rocking boat in the hot, humid conditions (80-85 deg F), but most divers were able to gear up and make it into the water. The divers found low 10' surface visibility, a 70 deg F surface water temperature, and a thermocline at 50'-60' with 40-42 deg F water below it. There was a dim 30'-40' of visibility on the bottom, enough to be able to see and navigate this large wreck.

The mooring was tied at the stern, which points northeast, and attaches to the skeg near the large four-bladed propeller and single rudder. The rudder appears to be a slightly archaic design when compared to modern rudders. Although the bottom is fairly deep, most of the wreck can be seen by swimming along the gunwale on the west side of the wreck at a depth of 105'-110'. Due to the depth and large size of the ship, not everyone had the time to swim the entire length of the wreck, so many stayed at the stern or only swam half of the wreck's length. Fortunately, the stern deckhouse offers much to see. Its doorways and portholes can be looked into to see the partially silted interior of the rooms, but it would be unsafe to enter without the proper equipment and training. The interior is easily silted, and the tilted landscape makes disorientation easy. A small deck at the extreme stern is half buried in the mud bottom and has a winch mounted to it that is also half-buried. The stern deckhouse is immediately forward of this small deck, and on its upside-down roof are two lifeboat davits and two cradles that used to support a now-missing lifeboat. Very close to the bottom at the center of the roof can be seen the raised skylights to the engine room partially buried in the mud. A covered breezeway extends over the aft portion of the deckhouse's side walkway. Inside the breezeway is an open door leading to two rooms with two portholes. After the breezeway ends, there is another open door and room, and on the roof is a square metal box that is partially buried in the bottom. A

crew ladder leads from the roof to the deck in front, and mounted on the deck next to the deckhouse is a cargo winch. The aft-most cargo hatch is on a significantly raised deck section, and another crew ladder forward leads down to the main cargo deck.

On the main cargo deck are six more cargo openings that can be seen while swimming down the length of the wreck along the port gunwale. Between the fifth and sixth cargo openings is another winch mounted to the deck. The forward deckhouse is then encountered with the wheelhouse buried in the silt but the lower crew quarters exposed. There is an open doorway at the aft end of the deckhouse, and peering inside, a wood-paneled hallway and rooms can be seen with doors, a steam radiator, and ceramic electrical insulators on the wall. In front of the deckhouse is a small deck with a half-buried windlass on it. The stem can then be seen curving gracefully into the bottom at the very front. Nearby, the port side's navy-style anchor can be seen still stowed in its hawse recess at the bow, and there is a mooring tied to this anchor.

Many divers had trouble boarding the boat after the dive due to the building seas, which had built to 3'-5' with whitecaps and heavy spray. It was wisely decided to cancel the second dive and skedaddle back to shore instead. It was a rough trip back, reinforcing that the decision to return was a good one. Since there was still plenty of time in the day, some divers decided to go to the Johnson Estate Winery in nearby Westfield and sample their fine wines. This region of New York has extensive grape growing, juice bottling, and wineries that should not be missed if blown off the lake. Afterwards, everyone went to dinner at the lakefront Harbor House and watched the waves rage from the safety of shore.

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The next morning, Sunday, July 12, 2009, was sunny, cool, pleasant, and calmer but still with 2'-3' seas, so it was decided to again not make the long trip across the lake to the "Trade Wind" and "Crystal Wreck." Additionally, the previous day's strong southwest wind would have likely caused almost no visibility on these wrecks, which are up against Long Point. Instead, the south shore was followed towards Erie, PA, to the first wreck of the day, the "Dean Richmond," a 238'x35' wooden steamer that sank in October, 1893, in a terrific storm that was the remains of the 'Charleston Hurricane' from the tropics. The ship was lost with its entire crew of 23 and a cargo of zinc ingots, flour, and general package goods. In the 1960's through 1980's it became one of the most sought shipwrecks in the lake because of rumored treasure aboard in the form of copper ingots and secret government gold. After eight years of great financial and personal hardship, Garry Kozak found this wreck in 1983. After dynamiting the ship's upside hull to gain access, he discovered there was no treasure, just the cargo originally listed on its manifest.

The fact that the ship lies upside down is unusual for a wooden vessel and speaks of the violence of the storm that sank it. It rests in 110' of water with the bow pointed northeast and stands about 15'-20' high off the bottom. The mooring was attached to the bow, which is broken on the port (east) side from the salvage operation's dynamite. Unfortunately, great changes have happened to the wreck recently in this area. The port side from the break to amidships has collapsed downwards, exposing the interior of the wreck with its hanging knees and frames. The bow's port side has also started to slump, but the starboard (west) side of the wreck remains intact. The ship is still intact on the port side to the stern after the collapsed section, and there are occasional holes that allow access to the interior for the properly trained and equipped diver. At the stern is the port propeller of this twin-screw vessel. A large single rudder at the centerline is turned hard to starboard, but the starboard propeller is missing from the 1980's salvage. The round fantail is sunken into the bottom and is gracefully curved with sculptured grooves in the clay around it. It is obvious the entire wreck rests in a slight bowl that descends down to the wreck, and the ship is surrounded by an enormous amount of wooden debris with large pieces up to 50' off the wreck. On the starboard side amidships is a large pole sticking vertically out of the bottom about 15' high. This is one of the ship's masts amazingly stuck into the bottom and snapped off when the ship sank upside down. It was also noticed several ice-protection metal plates over the wooden hull on both the bow and stern have started to come loose and fall off, leaving blank spots with no zebra mussels. These changes are obviously recent.

Bottom conditions were bright and clear with about 40'-50' of visibility, but the temperature was noticeably colder than the previous day at about 39-41 deg F. Many found it uncomfortably cold and headed up early. The thermocline remained at 50'-60' with 10'-15' of visibility and 70 deg F water above it. After surfacing, the seas were calm at 2' or less. A short trip was then made to the second wreck, the 137'x25' barkentine "Indiana." It is also called the "Stone Wreck" due to its conspicuous cargo of sandstone from Buffalo that was eventually used to identify it. Large stone blocks, both square and irregular, cover the deck and fill the cargo hold. This ship sank in 95' of water after springing a leak in September, 1870, but fortunately the entire crew survived in the lifeboat. The bow points northeast with the mooring tied amidships on the starboard rail. The hull's sides are intact and stand 5'-8' high off the bottom except at the bow, which is collapsed. The bow is split apart with scattered wood along the bottom for the first 20' of the wreck. Pointed outwards from the bow on the starboard side is a spar or mast. The pawl bitt is leaning forward, and behind it lying on the bottom is a large windlass spool with the remains of the crank mechanism. Behind the windlass is a vertical wooden pole that stands 5'-8' off the bottom. It could be a mast stub, but there are two side-by-side holes on its top and one hole on its aft side about 2' down from the top that strongly suggests it was, in fact, a pump.

Aft are the frames of a cargo hatch. The starboard side's decking is collapsed, but the port side decking is intact. On the port side the stone-filled spaces underneath the deck can be glimpsed with stone also piled on top of the deck. Separating the two sides is the first of two centerboard boxes. There is a boom or gaff resting on the starboard side among the rubble of the collapsed deck. A capstan is at the box's center and fallen to the starboard side. The capstan is an older style with the cylindrical head and with decking still attached to its base. A small hatch straddles both sides of the centerboard box on the aft end, but no centerboard winch can be found. The mainmast opening in the deck can be seen immediately aft of the first centerboard box, and then the second centerboard box immediately begins. The decking on both sides becomes intact towards the end of the second centerboard box, and the winch for this centerboard can be seen to be in place. Another cargo hatch opening follows, and a diver can enter this opening and swim underneath the deck in the narrow 3' space between the deck and stone cargo towards the stern.

Stone is scattered all over the deck, and after the cargo hold is a 5'-high mizzenmast stub. Lying in front of the mast stub there is a two-sheaved block on the deck, and a cleat is mounted to the deck in front of this. Aft of the mast is a double-cylinder pump of an older-style. Further aft is the cabin hole with the suggestion of a companionway at the front center. Another block is lying on the cabin's floor inside, and then the transom is encountered. Lying on the bottom at the very stern behind the wreck on the port side is the ship's stove slightly underneath the ship. Overall, this is a very attractive and interesting wreck that many of the divers enjoyed. Again, it was noticeably colder on this wreck (40-41 deg F), but visibility was good at 40'-50' with bright ambient lighting. After the dive, everyone relaxed during the nice leisurely trip back to shore with a small detour along the way. The sea conditions were extremely calm at less than 1'. Overall, despite the bad weather on the first day, it was a great trip, and everyone had a good time visiting the wonderful shipwrecks of Lake Erie's eastern basin.

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After visiting the "Indiana" on Sunday, July 12, 2009, Jim Herbert of Osprey Charters decided to use the opportunity to check out a new wreck recently discovered in Lake Erie's eastern basin. It is an unidentified sailing vessel in 80' of water, and it was discovered several weeks previously while Garry Kozak and Jim Herbert were searching with Garry's side scan sonar. The coordinates were not precisely known from the side scan sonar survey, so Jim decided to use the calm conditions to locate the low-lying wreck with the bottom sonar. This was soon accomplished, and after throwing a shot line, four divers geared up with their remaining gas to take a closer look. This included Georgann and Mike Wachter, who took some basic measurements, and Cindy LaRosa and Kevin Magee. Upon descending, a broken up wooden wreck was found with its bow to the west. The bow itself stands 5'-8' off the bottom and is tilted to the port

(south) side. A very long bowsprit tilts downwards off the bow to the west before being buried in the bottom 15'-20' away. Frames stand to the port (south) side of the bow before tapering off and disappearing into the bottom after about 10'. A very long distance (~50') of empty bottom then exists before a standing centerboard box is encountered along with two standing sides. There are two unidentified pieces of debris barely exposed on the centerline between the bow and centerboard box. There is also what appears to be a capstan base buried directly in front of the centerboard box. The centerboard box and sides themselves stand 5'-8' off the bottom and are relatively intact, but no decking is present anywhere on the wreck. Aft of the centerboard box stands side-by-side wooden pump barrels about 5'-8' off the bottom with linkages sticking out of their tops. Afterwards, the underside hull structure is visible gracefully tapering up to the transom. Fish net with silvery floats is snagged on the port side of the transom. The transom only stands about 3' high, and the rudderpost stands above the transom with the rudder mostly buried. The top of the rudderpost is plain, square, and may have been tiller steered. A small square hatch frame lies on the bottom inside the wreck on the starboard side where the cabin would have been located, and other wooden debris fills the interior. The port railing is pulled down diagonally off the aft end off the wreck and into the bottom.

Notable is the fact that no deadeyes, anchors, or other equipment were seen anywhere on the wreck, suggesting the wreck may have been dove in modern times and these items removed. Also, no cargo was evident, and the bad condition of the bow and absence of decking suggests historic salvage of the ship may have been done soon after it sank. Certainly the absence of any masts suggests they were pulled as a hazard to navigation soon after the ship sank. The bad condition of the bow also suggests there may have been a collision, possibly on the starboard side, that sank the vessel. In fact, given the long empty distance between the bow and the rest of the ship, the bow itself may be separated from the ship. A length of 117' and beam of 21' was measured, but the length measurement is suspect due to the above considerations.

In any case, it is a neat new wreck at a very reasonable depth for divers to explore. Conditions were excellent with about 30'-40' of visibility and bright ambient lighting. The bottom temperature was 41-43 deg F with the thermocline at 50'-60' and 15' of visibility above with 70 deg F surface water.

Georgann and Mike Wachter have suggested it is the schooner "Albion," which sank in a storm on Oct 8, 1858, with the loss of all 8 of her crew. The "Albion" was carrying wheat, and it was described as being discovered by fishermen six days later east of Erie, PA, with the topmasts just below the surface and the sails still set in 75 feet of water. It apparently sank quickly.