

It was a pleasant Friday evening on July 24, 2009, when Scott Harrison, Will Rehnert, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee went out on a night dive in Lake Erie. They left the Black River in Lorain, OH, aboard Scott's boat "Wreck-Reation" and headed east to Avon Point, where the "Craftsman" barge and crane lies in 40' of water on a rock bottom. The "Craftsman" is a 90' x 28' metal work barge that sank in June, 1958, when it foundered in rough seas while being towed between Huron, OH, and Cleveland. It almost took the lives of its two crewmen, who were pitched into the water and rescued by the Lorain Coast Guard as the barge rolled and sank.

The seas were a moderate 1'-2' for our trip, making for a relaxing boat ride to the wreck while the sun sank below the horizon off our stern. The wreck features a MAST mooring buoy, making it easy to hook and ideal for night dives. The mooring's large concrete block lies on the bottom at the northeast corner of the barge. The barge is upright on the bottom and lies east-west with the deck 8' above the bottom. Upon descending a good 8'-10' of visibility was encountered with no current. The water was a balmy 73 deg F with no thermocline, allowing diving with no hood or gloves if so inclined. The wreck features two large deck winches with cable still wrapped around the drums, one on the northeast corner and one on the southwest corner. At the center of the wreck is a large circular turret where the crane was mounted. There is a large rectangular deck opening immediately south of the turret where control levers are mounted. Elsewhere on the deck are other small openings to spaces below deck. Some feature ladders, but all lead to only very small, heavily silted compartments that are not worth entering. Encountered on the deck were sleeping fish, mostly perch, and several large sheephead were encountered that flashed in and out of our light beams.

The wreck was circled several times, and then a trip was made east to the crane about a hundred feet away. The crane can be found by following a small line off the mooring block to the end of the crane's truss-like boom. The boom lies on the bottom and can be followed south to the crane's cab. The cab is lying on its side with its mounting wheels pointed south. There is a dredge bucket nestled between the boom and cab, and machinery parts and a boiler can be seen in the cab. Inside protected spaces were small fish fry, hovering as diffuse clouds illuminated by our lights. A sunken tree lies on the bottom next to the cab on the east side, and several small perch were seen hovering around it.

Overall, it was a very pleasant dive, and both the barge and crane were circled several times. After an hour, we surfaced to find the lake had kicked up to choppy 2' seas with some swells, so we quickly boarded the boat and headed back to port. We arrived at about 11:30 PM, unloaded the boat, and headed home tired but happy.