

On a sunny clear day on Saturday, August 27, 2011, Cindy LaRosa and Kevin Magee met Scott Harrison at his boat "Wreck-Reation" on the Black River in Lorain, OH. There was a steady northwest wind blowing, creating choppy 2' seas on Lake Erie, but the weather was otherwise quite pleasant with a 75-80 deg F air temperature. They left port and headed west into the waves to meet Greg Ondus and Gary Humel, who had already set out from Vermilion, OH, on Greg's boat "Pirate." By the time "Wreck-Reation" caught up to "Pirate," Greg was attached to the newly installed MAST mooring on the "City of Concord" about 10 miles off Huron, OH. This mooring and its concrete block were installed for the first time earlier this summer, and it is always nice to do a dive without worrying about hooking the wreck and whether or not the anchor is truly on the wreck. Kevin was particularly excited to dive this wreck since on two previous attempts over the years, he had almost zero visibility that made exploring and seeing the wreck very difficult.

The "City of Concord" was a 135' x 26' wooden package steamer built in 1868 but converted into a lumber carrier in 1890. In September, 1906, the ship was towing three schooner consorts loaded with coal from Cleveland, OH, to Michigan when it encountered a strong gale, the remnant of a hurricane from the Gulf of Mexico. The ship started to leak while fighting the strong wind and large waves, so it cast off its three consorts to fend for themselves. When the pumps could no longer keep up with the incoming water, two of the 12 crew refused to leave the sinking ship and drowned when the ship suddenly sank. Another crewman tried to board the yawl boat with the 9 other crewmembers but fell into the water. By a stroke of luck, he was rescued later by one of the consorts after being given up for dead by those in the yawl. One consort ran aground with no loss of life near Cedar Point, which is also where the yawl came ashore. The remaining two consorts, one with the rescued crewman, made it to the safety of nearby Huron, OH.

A 75-degree water temperature and 5'-8' of visibility were found on the surface, and this continued almost all the way to the bottom at a 45' depth. The bottom temperature was a slightly cooler 73-74 deg F, and the visibility was a dark, cloudy 3' or so with a light required to see details on the bottom. However, once about 5' off the bottom, the visibility improved to 5'-8' with better ambient lighting. Given the previously dismal visibility found on this wreck, Kevin was thrilled to finally see it for the first time! The concrete mooring block lies south of the wreck near the stern, which points west. By following a rope from the block north to the wreck, one is led to the tall engine that stands high off the bottom with its top at a 30' depth. The engine is an older style single cylinder design, and the cylinder is at the top of the engine with a supporting metal trestle underneath. Inside the trestle can be seen the piston rod and crank mechanisms that attach the engine to the propeller shaft. Around the engine and aft, the decking is mostly intact. Immediately aft is a square bitt that stands up, and it is undoubtedly the bitt used to tow the consorts. The stern of the ship is rounded in shape, and the rudderpost sticks out of the deck. On top of the rudderpost is a steering quadrant

that points away from the wreck since the rudder underneath can be seen to be turned almost 180 degrees. Two blades of the propeller can also be seen peeking out of the silt far underneath the fantail.

Lying next to the engine on the port side can be seen a large cylinder with two attached elbow pipes at each end that turn 90 degrees and terminate in flanges. It is likely this is a muffler or steam expander for the engine's exhaust. On the starboard side near the top of the engine, a large-diameter pipe leads forward and downwards to a large boiler at the centerline of the ship. There is no decking around the boiler, and there is another smaller tank mounted on top of the boiler that is held in place with four metal straps, two on each side. The boiler's fire tubes can be seen on its aft end, and coal was found piled around the forward end of the boiler. Both sides of the hull are intact and continue until they collapse near the bow. There was a substantial amount of debris evident both inside and outside the wreck, and better visibility would allow a more detailed examination of what is probably a lot of interesting parts. At the bow the stem stands tall with intact hull attached on both sides. The windlass spool leans diagonally off the hull on the port side, and anchor chain is wrapped around it. The square pawl bitt is present and leads underneath the stem at the very front of the ship. Overall, it was a fascinating dive, and the "City of Concord" offers a lot to see. Even better visibility would undoubtedly reveal even more interesting details. It was also very warm on the bottom, and no hood or gloves were really required.

Afterwards, Greg and Gary left to dive the Vermilion grooves before heading back home. Scott on the other hand decided to head further west to Kelleys Island. There on the eastern side just north of the airport runway is the wreck of the "F.H. Prince," a 240' x 42' wooden steamer whose bow caught fire on August 8, 1911, almost exactly a hundred years previously. The captain beached the ship in an attempt to save it, and several other ships assisted in putting the fire out with no loss in lives. However, five days later the smoldering fire on the grounded ship erupted again during a windy day to completely consume it. The ship was salvaged of its equipment, but what remains of the ice-damaged wooden hull still sits in 15' of water on a rock bottom. This is another wreck with a MAST mooring, making it another easy wreck to dive. However, as "Wreck-Reation" approached, it could be seen there was another boat near the buoy. Strangely, it was not attached to the MAST mooring buoy but was anchored on or near the wreck north of the buoy. The boat was flying a dive flag, so Scott tried to hail the boat on the radio on channel 16 but got no response. Scott slowly approached the buoy from the south looking for bubbles. The seas were completely flat and calm in the lee of the island, and some bubbles could be seen between the boat and the buoy. As we slowly approached with the bubbles firmly in sight, three people on the other boat began yelling at us "Three hundred feet! You need to get back 300 feet!" Scott yelled over asking if they had divers in the water. All we got back was the "300 feet!" response.

Another dive boat from Sandusky had also approached at the same time, so both boats hung back together to the south and tried to figure out what was going on. After waiting 10 minutes or so, two divers surfaced near the buoy and swam over to their boat about 50'-100' away. No more bubbles were evident, so Scott and the other dive boat began to slowly approach the buoy again. The people on the other boat again began yelling "300 feet! Our divers are still in the water!" even though they were hanging off the back of the swim platform. Scott asked if they had any additional divers in the water but only got the response they were going to call the Coast Guard if we continued approaching. Befuddled, both boats backed off again and waited. Astoundingly, after another 10-15 minute, instead of boarding their boat both divers swam away and submerged again.

With no patience left, both boats tossed their anchors several hundred feet to the south and secured them the best as possible on the rock bottom. Kevin, and later Cindy, surface swam over to the boat to have a little chat with the people. They were somewhat evasive, but it was learned they were from Connecticut (although their boat had OH registration numbers), they had learned about the MAST buoys on the Internet, and all they apparently knew was the 300-foot rule. They were advised in the nicest way possible to (1) turn on their radio to monitor channel 16, (2) we were MAST members and would appreciate them using the buoy rather than anchoring into the wreck, and (3) proper etiquette would have been to allow our boats to approach the mooring while their divers were on the surface hanging off the back of their boat. They were also advised we were going to be conducting our dives and that by the rigid definition of the rules they were quoting, they would not be allowed to leave under power until we surfaced and were back aboard our boats.

Despite the drama beforehand, the dive itself was quite enjoyable. Visibility on the bottom was about 5'-8', and the MAST mooring block is to the south of the wreck with a rope leading to the bow. The wreck lies east-west with the bow pointing west towards the island. Lots of friendly bass and perch were on the wreck as well as some large sheephead. Lots of pink, yellow, and white freshwater sponges were attached all over the wreck. The wreck is primarily the bottom part of the ship, and a thick, solid mass of wooden frames and planking stands 5' high and forms almost a wall that can be circumnavigated. In some places intact hull sides can be seen. If swimming over the top of the wreck, the large elaborate keelson can be seen as well as the stout frames. At the stern the wreck tapers to a narrow shape with a long rudder skeg visible. Forward is a high mound of debris that rises to within 2' of the surface. A MAST hazard buoy is chained here to warn boats of the very shallow waters. Scattered around this mound can be found many broken parts of the engine. It is impressive to see the stout metal parts of machinery torn and misshapen in this area. About halfway through his 45-minute dive, Kevin heard the sound of the engines on the boat with the two divers, and upon surfacing found they had violated the rule they had so staunchly quoted and left under power while Kevin was still underwater. Oh, well.

Afterwards, it was decided to use the remaining air in our tanks to visit yet another shallow wreck off Kelleys Island. "Wreck-Reation" traveled the short distance around the northeast point to the north side of the island where the wreck of the "Adventure" lies. It was a 108' x 24' wooden ship that was originally built in 1875 as a schooner but converted to a steamer in 1897. In October, 1903, while loading limestone at a dock in North Bay, it caught fire, endangering the crew, dock, and another nearby ship. A tugboat quickly pushed the ship away from the dock to save the dock and other ship. The captain, his wife and daughter, and crew were rescued with no loss of life. However, the "Adventure" drifted, grounded, and burned as a total loss. Today it lies very close to shore with its bow pointed south towards the island in 5'-8' of water on a sand bottom. The northwest wind had died by this time in the late afternoon, so the water was mirror flat, and there was no problem anchoring near the wreck. However, it was hard to get the anchor to grab the sand since it was hanging so loosely. Another boat was anchored near the wreck, so Scott anchored to the east. Everyone was relieved that there was no drama this time with the other boat. Visibility was about 3', and the bottom was covered in what was quickly dubbed "Lake Erie kelp." The thick weeds added some interesting scenery to the dive, and Scott quickly located the wreck by running a reel line from the boat. Visible was the keelson and buried frames running perpendicular off it. At the extreme north end is a four-bladed propeller, which was returned to the wreck after being displayed in an Ohio park for a long time after being salvaged. Occasional piles of stones from the ship's cargo, engine parts, and other timbers were also seen around the wreck.

There is another wreck, the scow schooner "W.R. Hanna," which lies very close nearby, but it is unknown if any parts of it were actually seen or not among the wreckage and weeds of the "Adventure." After surfacing, Scott, Cindy, and Kevin relaxed, swam, and enjoyed the very close shoreline view. After pulling the anchor and finding its weight in "Lake Erie kelp" attached, a tour around the island was taken before heading back to Lorain, OH, in an uneventful trip. Hurricane Irene arrived soon afterwards, filling the lake with big waves and stormy conditions that made everyone glad they were no longer on the lake.