

On a hot, lazy day towards the end of Cleveland's summer, Scott Harrison, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee met in Lorain, OH, to dive Lake Erie. It was Saturday, September 3, 2011, on Labor Day weekend, and they met at Scott's boat "Wreck-Reation" on the Black River. They entered the lake and headed east with the intention of diving some wrecks not normally visited. They were soon joined by another dive boat from Lorain, "Nobody," with Gary Humel and Greg Ondus aboard. The first wreck was a 15-20 mile run along the coast to about 4 miles off Lakewood, OH. It was the wreck of the "H.G. Cleveland," a three-masted 137' x 26' schooner built in 1867. However, by August, 1899, it was an old, leaky boat hauling limestone from Kelleys Island to Cleveland, OH. The ship sprung a leak, and the entire crew frantically took to the pumps to try and keep the incoming water out. A passing steamer stopped to help and offered the assistance of two crewmen and their lifeboat. The two soon joined in with the laborious manual pumping. A tug finally arrived and took the hapless schooner in tow towards Cleveland. The tug's crew also took turns at the exhausting effort of pumping to keep up with the incoming water. About halfway to Cleveland, however, the ship started to settle, and everyone leapt aboard the tug as the old schooner sank to the bottom in 50' of water.

The day was hot at 85-90 deg F even out on the water, and the sky was clear and sunny. A strong south wind was blowing, causing 1'-2' seas and making the wrecks further offshore uninviting. The surface water was a warm 75 deg F, and upon descending the anchor line, a thermocline was encountered at 45'. The bottom temperature was slightly cooler at 63 deg F, but visibility was excellent at 8'-10' with bright ambient lighting. The wreck lies east-west with the bow pointing west. The most striking feature of this shipwreck is that it is a huge pile of stacked stone that stands 10' high off the bottom. The stone more or less holds the shape of the ship's cargo hold while the wooden sides of the ship are splayed outwards. These sides have intact frames and attached standing knees but otherwise lie flat on the bottom. Amidships on the starboard side, part of the hull still stands upright about 5' high.

Sticking up out of the middle of the stone pile is the ship's centerboard box. It forms a wooden wall about 2'-3' above the stone. At the aft end of the box, the centerboard winch is hanging precariously by its chain. Lots of gobies and two large sheephead were seen in the area. Moving forward, a square post can be seen sticking out of the stone pile, and near the bow are the broken remains of the windlass. The windlass spool, Carrick bitts, and pawl bitt can all be seen lying scattered on top of the stone pile. At the bow the stem stands 10' high vertically off the bottom with attached hull pieces partially standing on both sides. What appears to be the bowsprit or a spar passes on the starboard side of the stem and heads diagonally downwards into the mud bottom.

Moving aft of the centerboard box, a two-barreled metal hand pump can be found lying on top of the downwards sloping stone pile as it heads towards the stern. This is the pump where the crew and rescuers labored so hard to try and prevent

the ship's sinking. Attached to the pump are pieces of broken metal pipes which would have reached down into the ship's bilge below the stone pile. Reaching the stern, it still has a square shape, and the underside curves of the hull are visible. However, the rudder and transom are missing. Heading out into the debris field north of the stern, these missing pieces are found lying flat on the bottom not too far away. The large transom has two square porthole shapes with decorative flourishes at the top, but the portholes themselves are missing. A metal ring is attached to the top center of the transom, and it would have held a block for the mizzenmast boom. There is probably even more equipment and wreckage to be found in this debris field, but a lack of remaining time prevented further exploration. Overall, it was an excellent dive that showed this wreck has much to offer for what is normally described as just a stone pile.

Afterwards, it was decided to dive the "Bay Coal Schooner" to the west 4 miles off Bay Village, OH. This is a small unidentified 75' x 20' two-masted schooner that sank in 55' of water while carrying coal. Being at a similar depth and distance from shore, it was hoped this infrequently visited wreck would also have the same good visibility found on the "H.G. Cleveland." Surface conditions were the same, but upon encountering the thermocline at 45', visibility decreased to 2'-3', and conditions were dark, requiring a light to see. The wreck lies north-south with the stern to the south. The anchor snagged on the bottom slightly off the wreck's stern, but the wreck was quickly found using a reel. The stern is square with the rudder missing. There is no deck, and the sides stand about 1'-2' high off the bottom. On the port side amidships the lake bottom actually reaches to the gunwale. The inside of the wreck is lower than the lake bottom and is typically 2'-3' below the gunwales. There is a deadeye on the port side, and a large block of coal has been placed for viewing on the starboard side. A centerboard box stands in the middle of this wreck with three beams reaching across the wreck's width at this location. The centerboard itself can be glimpsed inside the box by peering into the forward or aft slots, but no centerboard winch was evident. The stem is standing at the bow, and the pawl bitt for the windlass stands behind it. The pawl bitt is fairly elaborate with multiple recesses carved into the back of it. The front halves of the Carrick bitts stand on each side of the pawl bitt, but the windlass spool and back halves of the Carrick bitts are missing. Due to the low visibility, not much more of the wreck could easily be explored.

After the dive Gary and Greg headed directly back to port, but Scott, Cindy, and Kevin decided to use the remaining air in their tanks to dive some of the shallow wrecks along the coast on the way back. The first wreck was the 74' x 18' wooden tug "Alva B," which is located just west of Avon Point in 10' of water. The tug was built in 1890, and in November, 1917, it was traveling from Sandusky to Cleveland, OH. World War I was underway, and the vessel was being delivered for government service. The ship sprung a leak in a storm, and when the crew could no longer keep up with the incoming water, it was beached. The crew made it safely ashore in a lifeboat before the storm completely destroyed the tug. In an alternate story, however, the captain and crew had

supposedly been drinking heavily and beached the tug when the lights of a nearby amusement park were mistaken for the lights of Cleveland. In either case the wreck is within a few hundred feet of shore on a hard rock bottom. The ship's boiler comes to within 2'-3' of the surface, so care must be taken when approaching the wreck. It is best to have someone on the bow looking for the boiler when approaching, and the boat should be anchored so it will not swing into the boiler.

The main body of the wreck, which consists of a raft of timbers approximately 20' long by 8' wide by 2' high, lies east-west with the stern to the east. A propeller shaft is attached to the wreckage, but the propeller is missing and is apparently on display at a nearby park after being removed by divers in the 1980s. A metal-stocked anchor from the wreck is also supposedly on display somewhere in the area after being removed from the wreck in the 1970s. At the eastern end of the wreckage, a single-cylinder engine lies fallen to the south. Its piston rod and crank are visible inside the supporting trestle, and they are attached to the propeller shaft. A valve and round toothed gear are also part of the equipment visible in this area. The boiler is a short distance to the east and lies east-west with the firebox on the western end. The boiler lies on its side with the flue for the smokestack pointed south.

South of the main wreckage, the tug's large wooden rudder lies flat on the bottom with an attached rudderpost and steering quadrant. This is where the anchor snagged, and the divers were greeted by about 5' of hazy visibility, warm 80 deg F water, and lots of large inquisitive bass that swam right up to their faces. After visiting the various pieces of wreckage, a reel was used to run 100' to the north. Only flat rock with no additional wreckage was found, so an arc was swung to the west and then south without finding anything further. Another search to the south towards shore also did not turn up any additional pieces of the wreck.

Afterwards, an attempt was made to find the "Penelope," a 74' x 14' wooden boat that was originally built in 1892 as a private pleasure craft before being converted to a fishing tug near the end of its life. In December, 1909, while traveling to the St. Clair River for winter layup, the bow of the ship burst into flames, endangering the three crewmen aboard. They turned the boat towards shore and watched as their lifeboat burned up. They managed to escape, however, in a smaller partially burned yawl boat and made it safely to shore with some burn injuries. Despite another tug trying to put out the fire and tow it to deeper water, the "Penelope" drifted with the wind and ice until it grounded in the shallow water. It is located slightly west of the "Alva B" in about 10' of water near to the Avon power plant. By luck, Georgann and Mike Wachter, who live nearby, were on their boat and stopped by to tell Scott exactly where to look for the wreck. Following their coordinates and directions, the area was carefully approached while keeping an eye out for the boiler, which reaches to within 3'-4' of the surface. After sighting the boiler and anchoring nearby, the area was explored.

There was again 5' of visibility with 80 deg F water, and lots of bass and other fish were around the boiler. It lies on a flat rock bottom in an east-west orientation, and the firetubes and single firebox are at the eastern end. The boiler lies on its side, and there is a large flue pipe pointed to the south. Near the base of the boiler is a linear gear, or rack mechanism, but otherwise there is no additional wreckage in the vicinity. Using a reel, a long swim was done to the south to search for more wreckage. Supposedly, large pieces of wreckage are in this direction about halfway to shore. Some scattered parts, metal spikes, and other debris were found, but not much else.

After this dive, the divers had used up all their available air, so they headed back to port for dinner and fond recollections of the day's diving.