

On Wednesday, David VanZandt and Kevin Magee once again went diving in the eastern basin of Lake Erie with Osprey Dive Charters in Barcelona, NY. The wreck dove was the "Cracker," a wooden sailing vessel that sank off Long Point in 190' of water. There is a nice painting of this wreck by Georgann on the back cover of the Wachter's new book along with some photos of the wreck in the text. The identity of this wreck is currently unknown. I haven't heard the story of why she is named the "Cracker."

It was another great day for diving with no wind, less than 1' seas, and bright and sunny but not too hot with only a 65-67 deg F air temperature - nice for suiting up without passing out from the heat. Surface viz was poor at only about 5'-10'. As we descended to the wreck, things went completely black at about 70'-80'. The viz, however, became gin clear, but we couldn't estimate it because we could only see as far as our lights penetrated, about 20'-30'. One estimate, based on how far away one could see approaching divers' lights, placed the viz at 50'-60'. It was very dark - a true night dive, even though it was noon. The suspicion is that the previous days' rain had mucked up the surface layer of water and blocking all ambient light from reaching the bottom.

In any case, the wreck is very nice. It must have sank slowly because the aft cabin is still in place. The wreck was snagged with our grapple hook at the very aft end on some cable, so we started there and worked our way forward along the starboard side, then back along the port side. The deck has several large cargo openings, but most are silted to within a few feet of the opening. No attempt was made to explore these opening because we were the first divers on the wreck and didn't want to silt things up. Furthermore, we were warned that this wreck is easily silted due to the bottom conditions. At the bow is a fallen mast and what appears to be a scrolled figurehead, although it was hard to make out through the moderate coating of zebra mussels. Yes, even in cold, deep, dark water, the mussels are thriving. The gobies have not yet reached the eastern end of the lake, and it is uncertain whether they will be able to tolerate the deep, cold conditions like the zebra mussels.

There are a large number of nets snagged all over the wreck, including over some of the cargo openings, so exploration would be tricky. One interesting feature at the stern was an old net and two floats about 15' off the port side of the wreck that are partially afloat and draped over themselves to form an unusual piece of accidental artwork. We ended the dive by hovering around the stern looking in through the cabin window and doorway, but did not enter. It appears to be heavily silted, but it is hard to estimate the depth of silting. The stern itself is nicely shaped and undamaged, and a good portion of the rudder can be seen. The rudder is turned hard over to port. No steering gear is evident, and there is apparently a debate over whether it was tiller or wheel steered because what remains could be interpreted as either one. Also noted on the wreck were a large number of burbot fish, at least 3-5 of them. Most hid, and a few swam screaming into the darkness with our lights following them.

Bottom time was 20 minutes, and total dive time was 57 minutes. Maximum depth achieved was 185', and bottom temperature was 40 deg F. Thankfully, the surface waters are getting warmer, and above 100' it started to warm up. The surface temperature was 56-60 deg F, but there appears to be at least two layers of temperature increase at 70'-100' and at 30'-50', although no distinct thermoclines were detected.