

On Saturday, August 5, Gary Humel, Monica, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee went out diving on Nobody's boat. Also joining the dive were Greg Ondus and Michelle Foss in Ondus' boat. The lake was great at 1'-2' seas with a slight chop, and the sun was shining the whole day with hardly a cloud in sight.

Everyone wanted to dive the "John Pridgeon," a wooden steamer that sank in 60' of water off Avon Point. The wreck has notoriously low viz and can be dangerous to dive because of unexpected openings into the broken interior of the wreck. However, Gary and the Wachters had 30'-40' of viz on the wreck during the previous weekend, so everyone was hoping the same conditions would be present again this weekend. As someone put it, "I've dove the wreck several times, but I've never SEEN it."

Conditions on the surface were promising at 20'-25' of viz, and upon descending to the wreck, it was discovered that viz was not quite as spectacular as the previous weekend, but it was still pretty good for the "Pridgeon" at 10'-15'. The wreck is upside down, or turtled. Near the bow to the west it is unclear whether one is diving decking or the flattened bottom of the hull, which only sticks up several feet off the bottom. However, upon reaching the stern to the east, there is no doubt that it is the bottom of the hull as the keel begins to rise and the massive propeller comes into view. The north side of the stern is relatively intact, but the south side is busted wide open in several places where the boiler and engine pieces punched through the hull. These are the holes that can make the wreck so dangerous in low viz. Since the viz was good, however, Kevin and Cindy went into one of the holes and under the wreck briefly to check it out. The ceiling quickly became low and the silt thick, so they didn't get far.

The thermocline was exactly in the middle of the propeller hub at 50', and it was clearly visible as a discrete boundary in the water due to the visibility changes above and below it. Above the thermocline the water was clear, and below it was murky. Also, the temperature changed sharply from 65-70 deg F to 55 deg F. Huddled above the thermocline around the propeller were seen a bass, a perch, and hordes of gobies covering the bottom of the hull. The hull was bare, unsilted wood in this region, and Cindy and Kevin had a fun time breaking open zebra mussels from below the thermocline and feeding the hundreds of gobies that would come running.

The second dive was on the "S.F. Gale," a wooden schooner that sank in the 1870's while carrying cut stone cargo from Kelley's Island towards Erie, PA. There were no survivors, and early divers supposedly found a skeleton of a man and a cat on the deck with a gun and spent and unspent shells in his coat pocket. I don't know if it's true, but it makes for a great story.

The wreck is a cute one and traditionally one of my favorites. Last year we regularly had 25'-30' of viz on this wreck. It is relatively intact except for a collapsed bow and stern and features a standing rudder, railings, stove in the

cabin opening, hand pump, fallen masts, winch, chain locker, toppled capstan, and stone cargo littered above and below the decks. Unfortunately, the wreck is at 75', which is well below the thermocline, and as a result, the viz was terrible. Not much could be seen through the 5'-10' viz fog which covered the wreck, and after a few minutes on the wreck, the viz went to zero in places. Most of the decking was bare wood, probably thanks to the work of the gobies, but not many details could be seen because of the poor viz.

It would seem that the shallow wrecks above the thermocline are the better wrecks to dive at the moment. This is perhaps a bit odd because the visibility is traditionally better below the thermocline, but there is usually no predicting from year to year what the conditions will really be. In any case, it was an enjoyable series of dives and a beautiful day. We all went back to Spitzer's Marina in Lorain, where a party at Doug and Rose's sailboat was in progress and where most of us spent a considerable portion of the evening. Gary provided the beverages, and a good time was had by all.