

On Thursday, August 10, an intrepid group of fourteen divers from LEWD, BAD, and other parts gathered at Barcelona, NY, to go diving with Jim Herbert's Osprey Dive Charter. Among the group were Georgann and Mike Wachter, Annette and Dave Soule, Joyce Hayward, Kevin Magee, and Gary Gentile.

Since the weather was perfect with 1'-2' seas, light wind, and 70-80 deg F temperatures, the decision was made to go to a newly revealed wreck called the "Crystal Wreck." It is a long 30 mile / 2 hour run from Barcelona to its location SW off Long Point on the Canadian side, so good weather and lots of time are a necessity for this trip. After arriving on site, most of the single tank divers (Wachters, Soules, Magee) were the first into the water and were followed later by the double tank divers. Mike had brought his video camera and wanted to film the wreck before it was disturbed too much.

The wreck is a very well preserved two-masted schooner in 120' of water and was once called the "Net Snag" wreck because of the many nets that cover its bow, sides, and stern. The bow has nets with floats still attached so that the nets hang draped artistically from several points 10' above the deck and down to the sides. Other floating nets are found off the starboard side hanging from debris on the bottom. The stern is heavily covered in nets so that the rudder cannot be easily examined.

The wreck is almost completely intact and stands high off the bottom. The only thing missing are the masts, which are fallen, and the aft cabin, which most likely blew off during its sinking. All decking is in place, and no damage is evident anywhere except for some fallen railings along the forward port side. The bow sprint is in place, and several winches are on the bow of the ship. Moving towards the stern, this is followed by a hand pump, mast post surrounded by a fife rail, hold openings, capstan, small winch, and the cabin opening. Inside the cabin opening is a table/stove with dishes on top (thus, presumably, the name of the wreck) and some old leather shoes. And at the stern is an intact wheel for steering the vessel. Supposedly the compass was also present when the wreck was found but was relocated for its own protection.

Visibility was estimated at a great 60'-80', the bottom temperature was 42 deg F, the thermocline was at 55', and lighting conditions were good. Bottom time was 20 minutes, and total run time was 34 minutes. After the first dive and a short surface interval, the Wachters, Dave Soule, Joyce, and a few others went back for a quick second dive. It is an excellent wreck that everyone wants to dive again. After the LONG ride back, everyone was in the mood for a big group dinner at the Barcelona Harbor Restaurant.

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On Friday, August 11, the same group again left Barcelona Harbor to go diving. Joining this group were Cindy LaRosa, who Kevin brought from Cleveland, and Chris Kohl, who could not make the first day of diving. The day was slightly rougher with 3'-5' waves early on, so it was a good choice to do the "Crystal Wreck" the previous day. Later the waves calmed to 2' seas, making for nice ride, and the light morning showers cleared to reveal another sunny afternoon.

The first wreck was the "John J. Boland," a very large steel freighter that sank in the 1930's off Barcelona. It is nearly upside down in 135' of water, but its port side is slightly upturned to reveal most of the superstructure. One approaches the wreck from the stern and descends onto its large rudder and 4-bladed prop. Swimming to the right - but not TOO far right - one encounters the upside down deck of the ship. Its size is immense, and one feels dwarfed by its features. Most of the dive can be spent just swimming its length. The stern has a deck house with several entrances into cabins, kitchen, and engine spaces. The center part of the ship contains the holds and cargo openings, and the bow has the bridge and some officer's cabins. All pieces are very much intact with very little damage evident. The stern and bow have a lot to see, and the long swim along its center section can be swum high to stretch bottom time at the bow and stern.

A burbot, or lawyer fish, was found on the bridge, and another one was seen amidships. Visibility was again 60'-80', but the light levels were fairly low, making filming difficult. Bottom temperature was 44 deg. F, the thermocline was at 65', and bottom time can be 15 minutes without resorting to deco if it is swum correctly. The penetration opportunities, proper equipped and trained, are enormous on this wreck, and dozens of dives could easily be made on this wreck without seeing the same thing twice.

The second dive of the day was the "Dean Richmond," the famous treasure ship of Lake Erie which contained no treasure when found. It is a wooden steamer upside down in 110' of water, and it is fairly intact except for the dynamite damage to the hull, which allows for more penetration opportunities and is responsible for the wide scattering of debris all around the wreck as far as one can see. Originally, many zinc ingots were found scattered around this wreck, but most are now gone. Like the "Boland," one descends onto the stern to find the rudder and a prop. The rudder is turned hard to starboard and the port propeller is present, but the other prop was removed by salvagers.

Swimming to the right, one can duck underneath the gunwale to examine the hold and engine spaces. Swimming along its length inside, divers outside the wreck can track the progress of those inside by the bubbles filtering up through the wooden keel and the light leaking through various points under the ship's gunwales. Hovering over the top of the bubbles, it's like being in a Jacuzzi. The bow on the right is split open by the work of salvagers, and several large holes

have been cut into the sides along the left side, making for easy penetrations and exits.

There is a wide variety of items to examine everywhere around the wreck, and something new is always spotted even after diving this wreck several times. A bathroom sink was noticed by Kevin off the bow, and Georgann spotted a possible ingot. The mysterious standing post 30'-40' off the left hand side of the ship was examined closely and discovered to indeed be the forward mast of the ship stuck into the mud vertically next to the ship when it turned upside down and sank. It is square cut with metal bands and fittings on it and matches well the photos of the ship before it sank. It's a unique accident that makes for an interesting feature to view.

Visibility was again 60'-80', and the light levels were much better than on the "Boland." The bottom temperature was 46 deg F, and the thermocline was at 75', surprisingly lower than at the "Boland" several tens of miles away. Dozens of small gobies were noticed on this wreck, which is unusual for the eastern basin. The zebra mussels had been rubbed off of various portions of the wreck by divers, and other portions seemed fairly clean of mussels naturally, possibly due to the actions of the gobies. The dive ended with Cindy demonstrating a stealthy way of doing a safety stop.

It was a great two days of diving, and dinner on the way back to Cleveland was at the Quaker Steak and Lube in Erie, PA. It's a restaurant with a garage motif, and Greg Ondus has got to see it one of these days.