

On Sunday, October 22, Kevin Magee went diving with Osprey Dive Charter in Barcelona, NY. The weather was a beautiful clear, sunny autumn day with air temperatures cool but pleasant at about 55 deg F. During the two-hour drive to Barcelona, the lovely fall foliage was visible, and the air was so crisp and clear that Long Point and Port Dover were visible across the lake in Canada as the highway wound down the mountain ridges near the New York state line. Unfortunately, the water conditions were not as nice with choppy conditions and approximately 2'-3' seas. There were few white caps, however, so the trip was deemed feasible, especially since everyone wanted to do this possibly last trip of the season.

The wreck was the "St. James," also known as "Schooner X" before it was identified several years ago after extensive detective work. It is a two-masted wooden schooner sitting upright in 165' of water off Long Point. It is notable because of several features. First, both masts are still standing, which is rare to find, especially after a hundred years. Second, it is in near-perfect condition with the aft cabin still in place along with its cargo hatch covers and all its decking. Most wrecks lose their superstructure, hatch covers, and/or some decking during their sinking when escaping air blows them off. Finally, the wreck has one of the few figureheads found in Lake Erie with a scrolled design under the bow sprint. It is truly a unique wreck and beautiful to behold.

The trip to the wreck site from Barcelona is a long one at about 1-1/2 hours. Unfortunately, as the ride progressed, the existing moderate northeast wind began to strengthen and bring cold Canadian air and rougher water conditions with it. By the time we reached the wreck, the seas were 3'-4' with occasional large 6'-7' swells. However, we were determined to do the dive, so one person was sent down first to make sure the mooring line was not fouled in the masts. Without checking, it is possible to damage or even pull down one of the masts with the dive boat's weight if the line is fouled around one of them. This is especially true in rough weather. After the all-clear signal was given, everyone else proceeded to suit up and enter the water.

Surface visibility was poor at about 10', but upon descending to the wreck, it was discovered that visibility was great at maybe 50'-100'. However, the lighting conditions were very dark starting at about 100'-110', where a weak thermocline is located. This is pretty typical of late season dives when the poor surface viz blocks out the ambient light to the depths below. This has convinced Kevin that he definitely needs a better light. Regular lights just don't work well under these clear but very dark conditions. The line was tied to the starboard anchor at the bow, which points north. Both the port and starboard anchors are in place and are hung on the bow railings just as they would have been before she sank. They are large fluted anchors with wooden stocks - just like the classic pirate ship anchors. A winch also occupies the bow area, and a hatch leading to the chain locker below decks can be seen behind the winch. The bow sprint is fully intact and is impressively rigged with chains underneath. Also underneath is the

scrolled figurehead, which can easily be seen without too much difficulty because the zebra mussels don't cover it too heavily.

Immediately aft of the winch is the first standing mast, complete with a life rail around it and a boom fallen to the port side. Behind the mast is a hatch opening with its cover still intact, a capstan, and another covered hatch. The second mast is then reached, also standing upright with a life rail around it. Finally, another covered hatch is found, then the cabin. The deck is covered with several feet of silt, hiding the boards and anything small that would be lying on the deck. The cabin can be seen to be almost completely filled with silt, and peeking out of the silt behind the cabin can be seen the ship's wheel, half buried. Off the stern of the ship can be seen the exposed rudder and underside lines of the ship. The rudder is turned slightly to starboard. All rails are intact except for a small section of the port rail, and deadeyes and belaying pins can be seen in place on the rails.

The deck depth is at about 150', and the wreck can easily be seen by cruising above it at about 140'. Coming down, the mooring line passes right past the forward mast, but it was missed on descent because of the dark conditions. Looking up from the deck, however, the mast could be seen silhouetted against the dim surface light and looked quite impressive. Examining the forward mast on the way up, it appeared to have a spiral pattern cut into its wood. It was still going up at the 110' depth when it was lost in the poor surface viz. As a result, her masts must stand at least 50'-60' above the deck.

Maximum depth achieved was 153', bottom time was 20 minutes, and total run time was 47 minutes. The bottom temperature was 41 deg F, and the surface temperature was 52 deg F. Getting back on the boat proved to be an extreme challenge because of the very rough conditions. In fact, it was probably the most difficult boat boarding I've ever done. It could only be accomplished with snorkelers in the water taking your fins and stage bottle off for you while you held onto a trailing tag line. Then you needed to be helped up the ladder by another person on the swim platform while the boat plunged and rose with you hanging onto the ladder. A few bruised ribs were obtained when 7' swells hit the boat at an inopportune moment. Once everyone was aboard, the trip back to Barcelona took a long time and was extremely rough. About half the people were somewhat ill during the ride home, and some never came off the back deck and remained suited up outdoors despite the wet, cold conditions. It was so rough that at least two tanks became loose from their bungees and needed some extra reinforcing. Jim Herbert's crew boat can definitely take a pounding! And it was warm and dry inside despite the waves and wind completely drenching the outside areas of the boat.

Finally, some treasure was found when a steel buoy with attached chain was spotted by Jim and hauled aboard. It turned out to most likely be the official mooring buoy to the "Dean Richmond." Its chain apparently broke at some point, leaving the buoy to float around the lake until spotted 10-15 miles from the wreck.

And last, but not least, once the dock was achieved and people began to feel better, a 1000th dive was celebrated with champagne and hearty congratulations. Boy, and what a dive it was!