

On Saturday, June 9, the lake was extremely flat and calm with hardly a ripple to be seen anywhere. So, Gary Humel, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee decided to go diving on Gary's boat "Nobody," and Greg Ondus and Michelle Foss decided to go diving on Greg's boat "Pirate." The day was clear and sunny with hardly a cloud in the sky, and the air temperature was a comfortable 65 deg F. Given the extraordinary flatness of the lake, it was decided to make the 30-mile run over to the Canadian side east of Point Pelee. Normally, this would be a long, rough trip, but the calm conditions made for a quick, pleasant trip, and it took only 1-1/2 hours to get to the first dive site. Along the way we passed the site of the "Morning Star," where the "Discovery" with Russ MacNeal of Underwater Dive Center was hooking into the wreck with a film crew aboard. We hope they got good pictures.

The first wreck dove was the "Clarion," a large wooden steamer that caught fire and sank in a storm in 1909. This is the same storm that sank the "Marquette & Bessemer No. 2," a famous ship that has yet to be found (officially) despite its large size. Upon entering the water, the surface visibility was seen to be excellent at about 15'. Gary, Greg, and Michelle dove first, then Cindy and Kevin dove after the others surfaced. The anchor was found to be caught on some loose planking on the bottom at a depth of 65' and several feet from the hull, but because of the great 10'-15' visibility, the wreck was easily seen. The anchor was also located at a break in the hull amidships where the stern section is located but the bow appears to be missing. The ship sits upright on the bottom, and the deck looms high off the bottom by about 10'.

Swimming aft towards the stern, which lies northeast, the deck cross members are intact but the planking is missing in many places, making for easy access into the large cargo hold below. Also present on the deck are various pieces of unidentified machinery, probably used in cargo handling. Towards the stern a large hole can be seen where the smokestack used to stand, and behind it is a large engine that towers above the deck. At the stern a cargo crane appears to be standing. If one drops over the side, the large rudder is visible along with the single three-bladed propeller. They are both located a significant distance under the stern, which is striking in how undercut it is. It is also interesting how exhaled air filters up through the overhanging structure to exit as streams of bubbles on the deck for many minutes afterwards, causing visibility to plummet to near zero in this area from the disturbed silt.

It is also possible, as Kevin and Cindy found, to swim through the propeller slot between the keel and the rudder. Be careful, however, because some netting is tangled on parts of the rudder and shaft. In fact, there is a lot of netting snagged all over this wreck, and care had to be taken when exploring its many openings and parts. Swimming back to the break in the hull, it was discovered that the ship actually continues along the bottom towards the bow. The hull's sides have collapsed due to the fire damage it suffered before its sinking for about half the length of the ship, but the bottom of the hull is still intact. The underside

curvature of the hull is visible, and swimming up from the keel to the side, one comes face to face with the lake bottom, revealing that the inside is really 5'-10' below the lake bottom. This allows 70'-75' depths to be achieved on this wreck even though the lake bottom is only at 65'. There is a lot of debris littering the inside, and occasional standing or overhanging pieces of structure are encountered. Sometimes one isn't sure whether you are inside or outside the ship.

Upon reaching the bow, it was found to be pointing upwards at an almost vertical angle. The bow is remarkably intact considering the damage leading up to it, and the lines and details of the ship's hull are quite visible and attractive. There is also a large ditch around the bow from currents scouring it, revealing a fair portion of it. Moving away from the bow along the port side, one can see that the side of the hull collapses gracefully inwards as it descends back into the clutter of debris that separates the high standing bow from the intact stern. Upon reaching the stern section again, it is striking to see how large the cargo hold really is due to its being revealed in cross section. Much time could be spent just exploring the aft cargo spaces below the stern's deck. In hindsight it is best to dive the bow section first, then finish on the shallower stern section. This shipwreck is striking in its massive size. Everything is exaggerated both vertically and horizontally, and it takes a long time to swim its full length. The wreck is much bigger than anything we are normally used to diving in the central basin of Lake Erie. There are lots of interior spaces, lots of structure, and lots of interesting debris and equipment in and around the wreck. Many dives could be spent fully exploring it, and it is surprising not more is heard about the "Clarion." We can't wait for the opportunity to dive it again!

After a pleasant lunch break, we headed several miles away to the "Willis," a three-masted schooner that sank after a collision in 1872 in her maiden year. She rests in 70' of water and is considered one of the premier wreck dives in this area. Once again, Gary, Greg, and Michelle dove first, then Cindy and Kevin dove second. Visibility on the surface was slightly better at 20', but visibility on the bottom was slightly worse at about 8'-10'. The anchor was found to be hooked to the port railing amidships near some deadeyes attached to the railing. Swimming forward, several more sets of deadeyes were found along the railing before reaching the bow. At the bow was seen a large winch, a pile of chain, and a large square wooden post, which may have served as a tow bit. Slightly aft is an empty collared hole where the forward mast used to stand. The extreme bow has a raised deck, and this leads to an impressive bow sprint, which is rare to find on many wrecks. One reason for its survival may be its sturdy double-barreled construction with two large poles, one on top of the other. It extends out about 10' from the bow before being broken off at what was probably the transition to just a single top pole to complete the bow sprint. The shape of the bow is also easily inspected since it lies about 5' above the lake bottom. It should be noted that the sides of the ship are completely intact, making this wreck unique in that it is not collapsed in some areas like many wrecks of this

age. It also stands fairly high off the bottom by about 5' and is not silted up to its gunwales like many wrecks.

Swimming aft, the decking is seen to be mostly intact with several cargo hatches along the way. Peering into them, about 2'-3' of clearance is between the ceiling and the mud bottom inside the holds, but no attempt was made to enter them. The deck is littered with coiled metal strands, which may be the remains of the ship's original rigging if it was wire-rigged. A capstan and two more collared mast holes can be seen amidships, and slightly aft of amidships are two fallen masts heading off the starboard side and crossing each other. Following them out into the debris field, they quickly get buried in the mud. At the stern is a large opening where the cabin used to be located, and the decking also begins to collapse in this area. At the very rear is some steering gear connected to the rudder post. It appears it may have once held a wheel, and a block and tackle is visible connected to the transom behind the steering gear. Going over the transom, the shape of the stern can be examined, and two small portholes can be seen that are apparently fairly unique.

Overall, it was a good dive. The zebra mussels for both dives were not as bad as on many wrecks in Canadian waters and the western basin. Although there were clumps of large mussels, they did not completely cover everything in a uniform layer and were usually only one layer thick, making the shape of objects identifiable. Bare wood was noted in many areas, especially on top surfaces, and gobies were seen in moderate numbers on both dives. The bottom temperature for both dives was 53 deg F, but there was no thermocline. Instead, the water just gradually warmed until a surface temperature of 60 deg F was reached. If flat lake conditions ever present themselves again this season, we will definitely be making the run over to this area.