

On Friday, June 29, David VanZandt and Kevin Magee played hooky from work and went diving in the afternoon. They left out of Whiskey Island Marina near Edgewater Park in Cleveland on Dave's new boat, the "Sea Dragon." Along for the ride were Mike and Georgann Wachter, who were eager to check out Dave's boat. The afternoon was beautiful with barely a cloud in the sky and a mirror-flat lake. It hadn't rained much all week, and the viz from the surface looked great. After a stop at the fuel dock for a full tank, they headed out to the "S.F. Gale," a two-masted wooden schooner that sank in 75' of water 20 miles off Cleveland in 1876 with the loss of all hands. It was carrying a load of lime and stone from Kelley's Island and was headed towards Erie, PA. After a nice ride out to the site and spending some time chasing fish - most likely schools of perch - on the bottom sounder, the wreck was hooked.

Mike and Georg proceeded to do their dive while Dave and Kevin leisurely suited up. When they were getting ready to enter the water, Mike and Georg surfaced to report no wreck for 100' around the anchor. Despite the low wind conditions, the anchor had never really hooked and had dragged away from the wreck. After pulling up the anchor and trying again, Kevin and Dave descend first to check that the wreck was actually there. It was, and the anchor had hooked to the starboard railing amidships. Nearby on the railing were a series of four deadeyes and a belaying pin board. The decking is intact at this location, and the stone cargo can be seen scattered all over the deck. In the middle of the deck is a mast hole, but the mast is gone. Immediately aft mounted to the deck is a marvelous hand pump with the pistons and linkages still intact. Forward of the mast hole is a square post or bit, and forward of that is a small winch mounted to the deck. The winch is in excellent condition, and the individual teeth of the gears can be seen. Swimming further forward towards the bow, which lies pointing southwest, a large cargo hatch is located with a large horizontal cylinder mounted inside it. Around the cylinder is wound chain, probably for the anchor.

Further forward towards the bow the decking and sides collapse into a jumble. Among the jumble can be seen a large toppled capstan with a portion of decking still attached to its base. A fallen mast can be seen running towards the bow and off the port side. Among the jumble near the bow is a large windlass, and anchor chain is still wrapped around it. The chain can be followed to a hawser pipe among the debris with a piece of the ship's side still around the pipe. No anchor is evident. Other pieces of equipment can be seen among the debris, including possibly the remains of the forward mast's fife rail. Despite the extreme destruction of the bow, the basic shape of the ship's hull can still be made out from the ship's ribs poking out of the bottom and coming together in a point at the bow. From the bow can be seen the surrounding lake bottom sloping down to the wreck, which obviously lies in a depression.

Swimming northeast towards the stern along the port side, four more deadeyes can be seen attached to the rail corresponding to the starboard side's deadeyes where the anchor snagged. Another empty belaying pin rail is also evident. Aft

of the hand pump is another cargo hold, then the decking collapses near where the cabin was once located. On the port side inside the cabin opening can be seen the remains of a stove, a unique feature of this wreck. Further aft the ship's sides completely collapse, and the only standing object is the large rudder at the immediate stern. The rudder is mostly buried but can still be seen pointing straight ahead.

Dive conditions were good. Visibility at the surface was an excellent 25'-30', and visibility on the bottom was a respectable 15'. In between were two thermoclines, a rare phenomenon. One was at 20', and the other was at about 50'. The surface water temperature was very warm at 80 deg F, and the bottom temperature below the deepest thermocline was 50 deg F. It should also be noted that zebra mussels are completely absent from the wreck. Instead, there is a thin layer of algae scum on most items, and everything is easily identified. Several gobies were spotted on the wreck, and old mussel shells litter the bottom.

The "Gale" is a very nice wreck but is unfortunately deteriorating. The description and sketch from the Wachter's book states that the bow should be completely intact and that the stern is only collapsed at the extreme transom. It also lists the rudder's wheel post/box as being present, but it is now gone along with the entire stern decking. It also lists three sets of deadeyes, but now there is just one set. These older details are also described in a book and sketch by Cris Kohl. Curiously, however, both books are missing the large capstan, and the locations of the cargo openings in both books are different from what was observed. In any case, however, the wreck is significantly collapsed compared to when it was first mapped. There are also signs some items may be disappearing from the wreck. Kevin remembers some belaying pins being in place in the racks, and Georg noticed some other things that seemed amiss.

After the dive and during the safety stop, Dave and Kevin inspected the bottom of Dave's boat for the first time. This was very easy given the excellent surface viz. Afterwards, when everyone was aboard, they headed to the "Sand Merchant," a wreck off Avon Point. However, given an approaching thunderstorm and the late hour, it was decided to head back to Cleveland instead of dive the wreck. Overall, it was a good day with excellent weather and good dive conditions. There are signs that an algae bloom may soon appear in the upper water layer, however, so enjoy it while it lasts!