

On Sunday, July 7, David VanZandt, Ted Green, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee piled tons of equipment into Dave's van and headed east towards Barcelona, NY, to dive with Osprey Charters. Jim Herbert and his boat "Southwind" were already at the dock when they arrived. Steve Lewis, who had been on that morning's trip, was also at the dock and described the morning's dive conditions. Our original destination was the "Atlantic," a famous Lake Erie wreck that sank in 1852, but there were not enough divers to make the long 25-mile run justifiable, so a closer target, "Barge F," was chosen instead. This wreck was discovered August 1 last year and dove for the first time on August 3. It has yet to be identified. Ironically, this wreck was dove for the first time this season during that morning's trip. It is only a 10-mile run and is in 145' of water, which was similar to the 150' depth of the "Atlantic."

The lake was calm at 1' seas, and the journey was pleasant out to the dive site. Aboard were two other divers, Ed and Pete, both from the Cleveland area. Ed was diving for the first time with Osprey. Sam Genco was captaining the boat, and Sam's wife and son were aboard as crew. After reaching the site, everyone took their time gearing up and entering the water. The surface temperature was 75 deg F and visibility was decent at about 15'. Upon descending a thermocline was found at 35'-40', and it got cooler again between 65'-70'. The light also got dimmer to the point where a light was needed to see things clearly, although gauges could still be read without a light after one's eyes adjusted. Bottom visibility was good at more than 50'. Bottom temperature, however, was a chilly 43-45 deg F.

The wreck has changed considerably since it was first seen last year. There is now a permanent mooring, courtesy of Ian Marshall of NDA, installed on the large windlass at the bow. Gone are the large numbers of burbot / ling cod, and gone is the thick silt covering the deck. Previously, silt "drifts" up to the full height of the gunwale covered the deck. Now, the gunwales are fully exposed, and individual boards can be seen on most of the deck. A remaining small portion of thick silt is still on the deck on the port side near the bow, but huge potholes had been blown into it in an attempt to remove this last amount of silt. On the gunwales near the bow are sets of four turnbuckles on each side equal with the second cargo hatch. A fifth turnbuckle can be found somewhat removed towards the bow on each side. Down the length of the gunwales towards the stern, no more turnbuckles can be found, but metal rings are attached at approximately equal spacing and approximately equal to each cargo hatch, indicating a possible system for tying down covers over the hatches or securing deck cargo.

The five cargo hatches dominate a large portion (approximately two thirds) of the ship's length. They are wide and are actually one continuous hatch separated by dividers with a continuous cargo hold underneath. Two of them also have a divider running parallel to the keel in the middle of the hatch. The hold is filled to the brim with large chunks of coal and silt. Most of the cargo holds' frames have been scraped free of zebra mussels in an attempt to find tonnage marks in order

to identify the wreck. Only half of the extreme stern frame on the starboard side was still covered in zebra mussels, and Kevin cleared it without any success in finding some tonnage numbers.

At the stern is a capstan, and the top of it has been rubbed clean in an attempt to find more information about the wreck. Exposed is the name of the foundry that created the capstan in Quebec, but no date was evident. The center is occupied by an ornate design that Steve thought might be a Canadian maple leaf, but it appears instead to be a decorative compass design. There are lots of lightly etched lines and patterns in the spaces around and between the design, but they appear to be decorative only with no further information.

Despite being called a barge, the wreck has many features that are reminiscent of a schooner, including its somewhat graceful lines for a plain barge. This is especially obvious at the stern, where it is sharply undercut to reveal a "V" shaped hull and a rudder turned hard over. The stern is very round in design when viewed from above rather than squared off. It was noticed that the zebra mussels have also been scrapped off the stern in an attempt to find a name. The hull definitely appears to be made of wood, not metal. Above the rudder is a prominent ship's wheel at the extreme stern that appears to have been chain linked to the rudder. Near the wheel is a companionway that goes below deck. Last year it was filled with a plain silt bottom, but now there are boards and unidentifiable items sticking up through the silt. On the deck nearby is a frying pan, which may have come out of this companionway.

The wreck is intriguing, and one would presume, unique in its mix of features. Despite hints of schooner influences, there are many features indicating its definite use as a barge, such as its dominant cargo hatches and complete lack of masts, rigging, or propulsion. The bow is a tapered, blunted design and is not sharp. At the bow is a large square tow bit just forward of the windlass. A notch in the bow shows where the towrope would have gone. The whole deck also has a utilitarian air about it with little ornamentation. Both large wood-stocked anchors are lying on the deck at the bow with their flukes points towards the stern, but the starboard anchor was noticed to be completely missing its wooden stock, making it lie down flat against the deck instead of standing up.

Bottom time was only 20 minutes due to the cold conditions, and total run time was 41 minutes. Even Ted, who was using his Buddy rebreather, complained of the air tasting cold. Maximum depth was 141', and most of the deck can be easily seen at 130'. It is obvious from the signs of activity that people are trying hard to identify this new wreck. Hopefully, they will succeed in the near future so the full history and story of this ship can finally be told.