

On Saturday, August 2, 2003, twenty divers from AquaMasters, LEWD, and BAD met at Osprey Charters in Dunkirk, NY, to go diving in eastern Lake Erie. The divers were Georgann and Mike Wachter, Dave Soule, Rita Montorsi, Chris Pearson, Ann Stephenson, Nancy Miller, Dennis Troyan, Greg Ondus, Don Nichols, Ron Hudy, Jacques Girouard, John Norris, Mark Siebert, Kelly Colebrook, Griff Ralston, Jeff Malcolm, Perry Dryden, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee. Along for the ride was "Ondus Guest," Linda, and "Miller Guest," Dottie. The two wrecks were the "Niagara" and "George C. Finney," both recently found and new to many divers on the boat, which added to the excitement of the trip. Osprey's new boat "Horizon" out of Dunkirk was used for this trip since it is closer to these wrecks. Captaining was Sam Genco with the able crew of Kathy Melice and Roger. The weather was overcast with 2'-3' seas, and a rainstorm had just left the area when the divers arrived to board. Beforehand, some divers toured the historic Dunkirk lighthouse and military museum, which was nice. Some artifacts from the wrecks near Dunkirk can be found inside.

The first wreck visited was the "Niagara," a wooden steamer that sank in a December storm in 1899 with the loss of all 12 crew members. It sank in 85' of water with the bow pointed northeast. The overcast skies gave way to a sunny haze as the divers entered the water, where an excellent surface visibility of 15'-20' was encountered with warm 70-73 deg F water. Upon descending, it was discovered this warm water continued almost all the way to the bottom with the thermocline only 5' off the bottom at a depth of 80'. Most of the wreck could easily be viewed above the thermocline, leading to at least one diver actually becoming uncomfortably hot during the dive. Visibility was in the 50'-80' range, and everything was brightly lit. The mooring block is about 20'-30' off the starboard side of the ship near the stern. The stern features a massive boiler and engine, the details of which are obscured under a fairly heavy covering of zebra mussels. However, most of the surrounding wood is not too heavily covered and can easily be examined. Seen lying off the starboard side is the rudder with attached steering quadrant (metal triangular bracket), and seen collected on the broken, collapsed stern area was a ceramic dish looking something like a toilet seat and various metal bars, tongs, and spikes placed there by divers for all to see.

Moving forward, the ship's sides are splayed outwards with the deck missing. Not much was seen inside the empty cargo holds, but an upside down winch was found amidships with a piece of decking still attached to its base. One can actually hit a depth of 90' inside the hold since it is below the lake bottom. Arriving at the bow, it was discovered to be intact and standing high off the bottom by about 20'. The decking of the forecastle has collapsed diagonally downwards towards the bottom, but a metal anchor - minus its stock - can be seen resting up high at the extreme bow on the starboard side. A large square wooden bit dominates the bow and helps to keep the anchor from sliding down. A fallen windlass and metal cover plate of some type were found on inside near the bottom along with various jumbled wooden pieces. After the dive it was

discovered that one brave diver had actually done the dive in open-healed fins without any booties and only bare feet. Thank goodness it was a warm day and dive.

The second dive was the "George C. Finney," a 3-masted wooden schooner that sank in 100' of water in October, 1891, with the loss of 7 crew members and its cargo of wheat. The bow points east, and the mooring block is 20'-30' off the wreck's bow and slightly on the starboard side. Because of the deeper depth, the temperature below the 80' thermocline was 45 deg F. It was also darker than the previous dive, and a light was initially needed to see things clearly until a few minutes had passed and one's eyes adjusted to the dim ambient lighting. Probably because of the darkness, visibility appeared to be less at about 40'-60'. The wreck stands high off the bottom by about 10', and its sides are standing and intact all the way around the wreck. The bow is missing its bowsprit, and the port anchor is missing, but the starboard anchor chain can be seen leading from the hawse hole down to the bottom, where the large wooden stock is resting, presumably with the rest of the anchor buried in the mud underneath.

The bow's decking is intact, and seen was a square bit, the windlass, chain locker opening, pieces of chain and blocks scattered on the deck, a mast stub with a square fife rail around it, a hand pump, cargo hatch opening, and small winch. Next to the forward mast stub on the railing was seen a complete set of deadeyes, which tensioned the ropes used to support the top of the mast. The deck is missing after the first cargo hatch, but the hatch frames and centerboard box remain standing. At one point amidships was seen a mast hole with some deck planks over the top of it, one of the clues used to identify this ship from this modification to increase its cargo space. At the stern can be seen another hand pump, the standing rudder post, the fallen steering wheel lying inside the cabin hole on the bottom, and the graceful transom with a block attached to a metal rail at its center for the mizzen mast's boom.

Everyone agreed this was a great wreck with lots to see and explore. After arriving back at the dock, everyone headed back to Barcelona to eat dinner at Jim's daughter's restaurant and arrange for air fills for the next day's dives. The restaurant features great food at an affordable price - sometimes special cooked to order, homemade carrot cake, and lots of great beverages. It is fast becoming a favorite stop for hungry divers before and after the dives.

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The next day, Sunday, August 3, 2003, was overcast with drizzling rain, but the lake was flat at less than 1' seas, perfect for diving! Almost the same group of divers was present as the previous day except for the Wachters, Kelly Colebrook, and Griff Ralston, who had left to meet previously scheduled engagements. Replacing them were Ken Marshall, Ann Vespa, Michael Szloh, and George

Balas. This time the boat "Southwind" was used out of Barcelona, NY, with Jim Herbert captaining and with the help of Roger and Mike.

The first wreck of the day was the "Dean Richmond," a wooden steamer that sank in October, 1893, in a terrific storm with the loss of its entire crew of 23 and a cargo of zinc ingots and general package goods. For a century the Richmond was one of the most sought after shipwreck in the lake because it was rumored to be a treasure ship carrying valuable copper ingots and secret government gold. Garry Kozak spent nearly ten years searching for this wreck in the 1970's and 80's, only to discover there was no gold or copper. The wreck lies upside down in 110' of water with the bow to the east. The mooring is attached to the stern, and descending divers are greeted by the very large rudder turned hard to starboard. It was a twin-screwed vessel, but the starboard propeller was taken by salvagers. The impressive port propeller remains, and the gracefully curved underside of the transom almost forms a flattened deck on the lake bottom.

The bottom conditions were dim due to the rain and darkened skies, and the thermocline was found at 50'-60' with 45 deg F water below it. Visibility was about 50' due to the darkened conditions, and a light helped - but was not necessary - to view the wreck. The keel of the wreck can be swum at a comfortable depth of 90', adding to the bottom time on the wreck. Although inverted, it is an interesting wreck with a scattering of debris all around the bottom, mostly due to treasure salvager's dynamite in the 1980's, which tore holes and openings along the port gunwales of the wreck. Peering inside will reveal a large wooden "cavern" with a litter of wooden debris on the bottom. Penetration into this overhead environment is not advisable, however, unless properly trained and equipped with a reel and redundant equipment. Swimming to the bow, the port side is found to be split open and detaching from the main hull. Swimming back on the starboard side will reveal a small square salvager's hole that was cut into its side, and what appears to be a telephone pole standing 30'-40' vertically out of the mud about 20'-30' away from the wreck. This is actually the ship's mast, which somehow got stuck vertically into the bottom and snapped off as the ship rolled inverted and sank. The remains of a navigation light holder can still be seen on the mast, and the mast is somewhat square in cross section.

The second wreck was the wooden bark "Indiana," also known as the "Stone Wreck" due to its conspicuous cargo of Buffalo sandstone that was eventually used to identify it. This stone covers the decks and fills the cargo holds and exists in large square pieces as well as small irregular pieces. Because there was no mooring on this wreck, it had to be grappled, which took several attempts. Divers were warned not to hold onto the line for ascent and descent because it might accidentally free the line. Upon suiting up and descending, it was discovered that the grapple was indeed barely holding onto the wreck's side, but not much could be done to move the line to improve the hold. The bow points east, and the wreck was grappled on the port side near the stern. The

sides are intact and stand 5'-8' high off the bottom for most of the wreck except at the bow, which is completely smashed, probably from the impact of the heavily weighted ship with the bottom. The bow's windlass can be seen fallen over with the beefy anchoring support beams exposed underneath it. Lying pointing out into the debris field is the jib boom, which was attached to the bowsprit to increase its length. An old mooring line was attached to this jib boom. A burbot, also called a ling cod or lawyer fish, was seen on the bow and looks like a catfish with an eel's body.

Amidships the deck is collapsed but braced up by the centerboard in the middle of the ship. A fallen capstan is lying in this area. On the aft part of the ship the deck is intact, including up to the cabin hole, but the cabin is missing. Near the grapple point lying on the deck was a figure-eight shaped metal bracket called a mast step, which was used to attach a topmast to the lower mast. The rudder has fallen and lying next to the rudder post on the starboard side. Lying under the sharply undercut stern on the port side is a 3'-5' square metal box, which was the ship's stove. Lots of mast parts can be seen lying next to the ship, and some deadeyes are on the rails. Various blocks can be seen scattered among the stone cargo, and hatch openings are evident with the stern one allowing penetration below the aft deck. Two hand pumps were also seen, one forward and one aft.

One of the first divers ascending grabbed the line, and sure enough, it let go. Quick action by two other divers prevented it from getting away, and it was secured once again, albeit with great difficulty, to the side of the ship by wrapping it around a wooden post. The line managed to hold for the rest of the divers' ascents. The thermocline was again at 50'-60', and visibility on the bottom was 50'-80' with bright ambient conditions. The bottom temperature was warm at 48 deg F, but some swore it felt colder than the "Dean Richmond," perhaps because it was the second dive of the day. Everyone agreed this is an aesthetically "cute" wreck, and it's a shame it isn't dove more because it has a lot to look examine and see.

The day was finished after arriving back at the dock by the traditional trip to Quaker Steak and Lube in Erie, PA, for wings and cold ones. Cindy managed to get quick food service at the bar by denying she knew everyone else in the group. The rest were left to fend for themselves, some settling at the bar and others settling at nearby tables. Overall, both days had some great diving with good conditions. There were several divers on the boat who had never dove the lake before and some divers who had only dove the western/central basins of the lake before. There was also at least one diver who was very new to diving in general, and many of these divers were in wetsuits. At least two of them were amazed that they were not as cold as they expected, and all did great. In many ways, with the great viz and fantastic wrecks, diving in the eastern basin is actually easier than diving elsewhere in the lake, especially off the large and

comfortable boats of Osprey. It is hoped that next year will be just as good, and everyone is looking forward to it.