

On Sunday, August 28, 2005, Kevin Magee drove out to Barcelona, NY, to go diving in the eastern basin of Lake Erie with Osprey Charters. The wreck was supposed to be the "Sterncastle," an unidentified schooner in 190' of water. Thirteen divers had signed up for the trip, but even after getting a late start due to a fuel problem, only 7 divers had shown up, which were not enough to justify the long run. So, it was decided instead to dive a closer wreck, the "Cracker," an unidentified scow schooner in 190' of water off the tip of Long Point. It got its name because the people who found it were eating crackers, the only food left on their boat, at the time it was found in September, 1999.

The day was a good one with 1'-2' seas, a clear and sunny sky, and a comfortable 75 deg F air temperature. There was a slight surface current, and visibility on the surface was only 5'-8', but the water was a toasty 78 deg F. The thermocline was at 50'-60', and 40 deg F water was below it with excellent 80'-100' visibility. Lighting conditions on the bottom were initially very dark, but once ones eyes adjusted, objects could be seen without a light better than with one, especially distant objects. The mooring was tied to the starboard railing on the extreme stern. The rudder post sticks up through the aft steering deck, but there is no wheel or tiller attached to it. A triangular frame sticks up from the deck where a wheel might have been located. However, a large timber also lies across the deck near the frame that conceivably could have been a tiller, although its shape appears too spar-like. Therefore, the ship's means of steering remains unknown. The transom is sharply square in design, and the mostly-buried rudder is turned to port 90 degrees. There are a lot of nets on this wreck, and a net is snagged on bottom debris on the port side and decoratively floats upwards. The cabin is intact with a single companionway entrance on the port side at the rear. What appears to be a pass-through box is on the aft wall next to the companionway. It would have been used to pass things back and forth from the cabin interior to the helmsman without needing to open the companionway door. On the sides of the cabin are window openings, but the front wall has none. A small opening is on the roof on the port side at the front. Peeking into the cabin's interior reveals that it is almost completely filled with silt, and penetration is not recommended.

The deck is about 5' off the bottom, and a very thick layer of silt covers the entire wreck. Additionally, a heavy coating of zebra/quaga mussels makes examination of any exposed wreck features difficult. There is a cargo opening just forward of the cabin, and the starboard side of the deck appears to be collapsed forward of this. Amidships can be seen the centerboard box due to the collapsed starboard decking, and a fallen centerboard winch can be seen lying on the port side of the ship. Another cargo opening can be seen, and then there is a windlass on the bow. There may be other cargo hatches and deck equipment, but they are either covered in silt and/or obscured by debris and nets. Fishing net is snagged on the deck amidships and leads to the windlass, where it partially covers the port side and then drapes off the bow to the bottom. A fallen mast/boom/spar is tangled in this net and lies along the ship's deck on the port side before ending near the

windlass. The foremast can be seen fallen perpendicular to the wreck on the port side, and it runs far away from the wreck with the topmast still attached at the end. Deadeyes were noticed on the port railing just forward of the cabin, but none were noticed at any other location. The wreck is said to be a 3-masted ship, but only signs for two masts were seen.

At the extreme bow are several features that make this wreck unique. First, the bow does not have the classic pointed shape; instead it is square and diagonally undercut like a modern barge. This is the defining feature of a "scow schooner." Second, coming out of the middle of this bow is a scrolled figurehead with two hawse holes framing either side of it. Knightheads and a notch for the bowsprit can be seen above the figurehead, but the bowsprit is not present. Instead, the bowsprit is stuck diagonally into the bottom out in front of the ship. This probably happened when the schooner sank and hit the bottom bow first. The starboard hawsehole has a chain hanging down that ends before reaching the bottom. The port hawsehole also has a hanging chain, but it leads to an all-metal anchor hanging with the stock visible and its arms buried in the mud, giving the appearance of a cross. Inside the netting on the port side is what appears to be another anchor, but this could not be verified because of the heavy coverage of zebra mussels on the net. Overall, the wreck is very interesting and well worth the trip. Bottom time was 20 minutes, total run time was 56 minutes, 20/35 trimix was used with 50% nitrox and 100% O₂, and maximum depth was 185'. For those interested, pictures of the "Cracker" can be found at the following web site for Tom Wilson.

<http://www.scubaq.ca/ontarioscubadiving/cracker.htm>