

On Sunday, July 16, 2006, Mike Holda, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee met at Mike's house to go diving in Lake Erie. They loaded Mike's truck with their gear, attached his boat "Erie Lady," and drove to Fairport Harbor on Cleveland's east side where the Grand River empties into the lake. They got underway at the public boat launch, but within minutes they had to divert to two guys on a Sea-Doo in the inner harbor who were frantically waving at passing boats. Their engine had quit, and they needed a tow. A rope was thrown to them, and after a couple of attempts they managed to firmly attach it to their craft for a tow back to the boat launch. Afterwards, the "Erie Lady" was underway under a clear, bright, sunny sky on 1' seas to the first wreck, the "Queen of the West." This 215' wooden steamer foundered in a storm in 1903 about 8 miles north of Fairport in 70' of water while carrying iron ore. She was salvaged with a clamshell to recover the cargo, leaving little decking, but the rest of her is fairly intact.

Attached to the wreck is a MAST mooring, making diving her easy. A current from the west was noticeable on the surface with a water temperature of 75 deg F and good visibility of about 10'-15'. However, upon descending below the thermocline at 55'-60', the visibility decreased dramatically to just 3'-5'. The bottom temperature was 53-54 deg F, and curiously the current changed in direction to come from the east instead and was quite noticeable on the bottom. The mooring is tied to the fallen metal windlass at the bow. It has a somewhat modern look and has a large metal wheel as part of it. A pile of anchor chain is forward of the windlass in the former chain locker. The stem can be seen to have split, and the bow points east. However, both sides are standing on this wreck, and due to the low visibility, they were used to navigate the wreck. Swimming to the stern, visibility improved noticeably to 5'-10', and the sides could be seen to have beefy railings.

At the stern a large boiler was encountered with two firebox doors on the forward part of it. It stands about 10' high, and behind it is a large, intact compound engine that stands about 15' high. There was little zebra mussel encrustation on the wooden parts of the wreck, but the boiler and engine both had a moderate covering, especially higher up. After examining the engine and mechanisms, a short swim further aft revealed the wreck mostly ends with the stern collapsed. Due to its length, the wreck took a while to swim back along the opposite gunwale, especially against the current. Upon reaching the bow again, a short attempt was made to explore the interior of the ship. Swimming a little aft of the windlass, a fallen bitt was found along with innumerable boards and what appears to be the hull's bottom fairly intact in some places. However, it was difficult to keep oriented and swimming in a straight line due to the poor visibility.

The next wreck visited was the "North Carolina," a small 75' steel tugboat that sprung a leak while being transferred between Cleveland and Conneaut in the winter of 1968 and sank less than a mile off Mentor-on-the-Lake in 35' of water. It was discovered there was no MAST mooring on this wreck, but there was a jug tied to a small line that descends to the wreck. Since the jug had no tag line,

someone had to enter the water to attach a line to it. Because the wreck was so close to shore, the surface visibility was poor at 5'-8'. A quick descent down the line revealed the visibility continued all the way to the bottom where the mooring is tied to the starboard gunwale amidships at a depth of 22'. The bottom temperature was 71-72 deg F. The tug lies at a 45-degree angle on its port side on a hard rock bottom with its bow pointed south. Lots of fish were seen on the wreck with several very large bass, a sheephead, and some perch. The bow's stem has a large rubber bumper attached to it, and the curve of the stem can be seen at the bottom. The bow's deck has a large bitt on it with fairings designed to give it a streamlined shape. The deckhouse starts aft with a companionway leading below decks on the port side. Peeking into the companionway revealed the interior is completely filled with silt. An open compartment behind the companionway is the remains of the wheelhouse. The roof and part of the walls of the wheelhouse have been sheared off by ice and lie flattened on the bottom off the port side along with the tug's funnel. Behind the wheelhouse opening is a separate open compartment with an intact bathroom on the port side. The bathroom is partially crushed with the door missing and a porcelain sink visible inside. Immediately behind this is the engine room with the diesel engine visible inside. The front portion of the engine room's roof is missing, but the rest of the roof remains with square windows on both the top and sides. A small companionway enters the engine room at the aft end on the port side, but the room is too small and silted to be entered from either the front or back ends.

The aft deck begins behind the engine house, and there is a large towing H-bitt on the deck. The stern is rounded with the protective covering missing over the rather extensive rudder steering mechanisms. Dropping to the bottom reveals a massive rudder that seems too big for the ship. A chain hangs partly down to the bottom from the top of the rudder. Swimming under the stern, a very large 3-bladed propeller that also seems too big for the ship can be seen partly embedded in the bottom. The large propeller-rudder combination obviously managed to give the tug significant steering authority even at low speeds with the propeller washing the massive rudder. There is also enough room to swim through the propeller slot from one side of the ship to the other.

After the dive Mike pulled out his famous "175 hp hot dogs," which he prepared at the beginning of the trip by putting hot dogs wrapped in tin foil on top of the engine block. After a day of motoring around and sitting on top of the hot engine block, they were cooked, hot, and delicious. Overall, it was a great day to be out on the lake, and everyone had a relaxing time.