

On Friday evening, August 1, 2008, Cindy LaRosa and Kevin Magee met Mike Holda at the Avon Point boat ramp to do a couple of dives after work. Mike brought his towed 18'-long boat "Erie Lady," which they loaded, launched, and headed out into Lake Erie. It was a pleasant evening with the sun still high in the sky at 6:30 pm, so they decided to head to the "John Pridgeon, Jr.," a 220'-long wooden steamer built in 1875 that sank off Avon Point in heavy seas in September, 1909, after springing a leak that suddenly increased and overtook the vessel. It was carrying lumber and towing a consort schooner, which anchored overnight near the sunken vessel. The entire crew was safely rescued by a passing steamer and taken to Cleveland.

After anchoring into the wreck, everyone suited up and descended the anchor line to the wreck. Surface visibility was great at 10'-15', and this continued almost all the way to the bottom where visibility suddenly decreased to 2'-3' below the thermocline at 50'. Fortunately, the anchor was just slightly off the wreck near the stern with the line passing over the wreck, which stuck up above the thermocline enough to see. The water temperature was a balmy 75 deg F until the thermocline was encountered, where it dropped to 55-60 deg F. The wreck is in 55' of water with the stern pointing east. The ship is upside down and mostly collapsed and flattened, especially as one approaches the bow, which is only a few feet off the bottom. Heading in this direction, the divers could barely see enough to navigate along the long straight bottom planks of the ship. Occasional missing planks and breaks allowed the ship's frames to be seen.

Heading towards the stern, the hull's bottom slowly rises to a depth of 45', where it can be easily seen above the thermocline. This is due to the boilers and machinery that are propping up the stern section from underneath. On the starboard (south) side of the wreck, these items punch out through the side of the hull and can be examined in detail, although there is a heavy layer of zebra mussels covering them. The hull is mostly bare wood, however, and gobies and schools of small perch were seen along the top of the wreck. As one approaches the stern the keel becomes obvious, and it ends at a 4-bladed propeller with a skeg but no rudder behind it. The thermocline was below the propeller hub, and the surrounding hull and bottom could not be seen. A strip of metal sheathing can be seen running around the hull near the propeller on both sides.

At the end of the dive while performing the safety stop under the boat, the sun could be seen setting while underwater, casting beautiful rays of dancing light around the divers. They surfaced just in time to see the sun set and to notice thunderstorms building to both the north and south. The large thunderstorm to the north appeared to be over Canada and was especially active with dramatic lightning bolts to the ground and between the clouds. Since it was far away, the divers ate dinner and then decided to head to the next wreck for a night dive. This wreck was the "Craftsman," a steel barge that capsized and sank in rough seas in June, 1958, off Avon Point in 40' of water while being towed from Huron, OH, to Cleveland, OH. It had a crane and two crewmen aboard. The Coast

Guard saved both crewmen just in time, and the crane was pitched out of its turret during the sinking event. This is one of the wrecks moored by MAST, so it was convenient to attach to the mooring. While heading towards the wreck, the "Erie Lady" had to avoid the laker "Canadian Transporter," which was running loaded east close to shore. Passing off its stern, it was an impressive sight to see all lit up and under full steam.

There were small minnows around the mooring buoy as the divers descended on the night dive. Visibility was great and extended as far as one's light could reach. Water temperature was also a warm 75 deg F all the way to the bottom. The MAST mooring is attached to a large permanent concrete block off the northeast corner of the wreck, and the wreck lies east-west. A rope runs from the mooring a few feet to the wreck, which is about 5'-8' above the hard rock bottom. A large winch is located on the deck in the northeast corner. Swimming along the length of the wreck, many bits and occasional deck openings can be seen. On the deck were a lot of large bass that were spooked when any diver spotlighted them with their light or came too close. One walleye was also seen on the deck. A large circular turret with geared teeth is near the center of the barge where the crane was mounted, and a second large deck winch is on the southwest corner of the barge.

Another rope off the mooring block goes east about 100' until it attaches to the tip of the crane's boom. The boom is a steel truss structure and lies in a northwest-southeast direction. It can be followed until reaching the remains of the crane cab, which is attached to the boom and lying on its side with its bottom pointing south. Small wheels that would have mated with the barge's turret can be seen on the underside. On the east end of the cab is a large tree lying on the bottom with its roots up against the cab and its limbs reaching towards the east. Looking into the cab in this area, swarms of small fish fry were seen hiding inside, and large bass and sheephead surrounded the crane cab.

Upon surfacing, it was discovered the north thunderstorm was closer, and thunder could be heard. The lightning display was absolutely incredible and fascinating to watch, but the divers decided to head back to Avon Point and call it a night. No rain ever occurred, but the display was impressive even after the boat was pulled from the water. Overall, it made a memorable end to a great evening of diving.