On Saturday, August 28, 2004, Greg Ondus, Jack Papes, and Kevin Magee went diving in Lake Erie's eastern basin aboard Osprey Dive Charters with Jim Herbert in Barcelona, NY. The drive from Cleveland to Barcelona was rainy most of the way, and there was a strong downpour when the divers first arrived at the dock. However, by the time the boat arrived and was ready for boarding the rain stopped, the sky cleared, the sun came out, and the seas were calm at 1'-2'. Temperatures were pleasant at about 75-80 deg F with some humidity. Aboard were 10 technical divers, making for uncrowded conditions. The wreck was the wooden steamer "Persian," which sank in 195' of water off the tip of Long Point in 1875 after catching fire in her coal bunker while carrying a cargo of grain. She was the largest Great Lakes ship in her time when built in 1874 and measured 240' x 40'. It was the second largest ship when it sank a year later.

Since no mooring was present on this seldom-dove wreck, several divers volunteered to hook the wreck before everyone else descended. Upon reaching the wreck it was discovered to be hooked on the extreme stern (E). The ship was obviously severely damaged in the fire and is truly burned to the waterline since only the bottom half of the ship's hull is present. Instead of a gunwale there are only the jagged remains of ribs and planking with a black charcoal appearance to much of the wood. The wreck, however, sits 5'-8' high off the bottom and can be viewed at a depth of 185'. The hull is filled with silt much higher than the lake bottom's level. The stern is less filled with silt than the rest of the wreck with much wooden debris scattered around inside. The wreck's stern is sharply undercut and is scoured out to about a 200' depth. Peering underneath the stern, a metal rudder and one blade of the propeller can be seen sticking out of the bottom. The square-shaped propeller blade is oversized and primitive looking compared to later designs. The remains of the rudder post can be seen sticking out of the hull above the rudder.

Swimming forward from the stern about 50', the compound engine can be seen sitting in the middle of the ship and rises 10' high. Forward of the engine a boiler is offset to the port side with its firebox openings facing aft and a smokestack exhaust manifold forward of it with the stack missing. The starboard side of the wreck appears to be damaged with lots of floating nets snagged in this area. Curiously, the offset port boiler suggests a starboard boiler should also be present, and photos of similar ships show two stacks. Either the second boiler never existed, it was somehow missed, or maybe it fell out of the wreck and is hidden by the nets on the starboard side. In any case there is a lot of machinery and interesting details to examine in this area.

Swimming forward into the cargo area, the interior is so filled with silt that almost nothing is visible. However, sticking up through the silt are many center posts and collapsed hatch frames lying in the middle with jumbled boards or pieces of decking occasionally visible around them. The areas around the hatch frames are depressed into the silt, exposing the debris. One impressive thing about the wreck is its absolutely enormous size, especially in width. It is more comparable

in size to later steel ships than to most wooden steamers. It was a long swim to the bow, but it can be reached at a comfortable swimming speed in less than 10 minutes. Reaching the bow, the 8'-10' tall bow stem post can be seen rising above the hull with its tip jagged and charred. The top of a winch with gears can also be seen peeking out of the silt at the bow.

Overall, the wreck is impressive both in its size and its extremely burned condition. We also had excellent conditions with at least 50'-60' of viz and very dim but ambient lighting - something unusual for this depth. After one's eyes adjusted, everything appeared to be diffusely lit like a snow covered moonlit night. The water temperature also felt somewhat warm at about 40 deg F, and the thermocline was spread out between 50'-60' with 70 deg F water above it and 15' of viz on the surface. Finally, the trip home was pleasant with glassy flat seas, warm air, and a lovely setting sun on the horizon. Bottom time was 20 minutes, total run time was 60 minutes, 20/35 trimix was used with 50% nitrox and 100% O2, and max depth was 192'.