

Diving for new found wrecks in Georgian Bay is quite an experience

by Priscilla Galloway
Sit down with me here in the sand, forty feet under the waves. We're off Hope Island and gazing up at the high wooden prow of a long-ago schooner, lost so completely that even her name has been lost. In the murky quiet, we can almost see her three masts raise themselves again her sails fill with wind.

What storm brought her here, I wonder? Were the men lost who sailed her or did they get ashore? Or was it a storm that took her? Explosion maybe? Later, my buddy and I will circumnavigate this wooden skeleton and see if we can guess any answers to these questions.

Check the air. I started out with 2200 pounds and have still 1800 left. My buddy no doubt wonders what I'm waiting for, sitting here; he's going on around the side. There aren't any ghosts here, and Georgian Bay is icy, forty feet down. Good thing I've got my full wet suit on, except the gloves; my cold hands are bare.

Gently, we flipper down the side of this wreck. It's very murky, the mud well-stirred by other rubber-coated figures. One swims toward me, gestures - and it's a school of perch, acres of perch, it seems, almost drifting by. Is there anything like thought in their fish brains as they look at me?

The man who pointed them out to me is a bald-headed fellow in black - I bet he wishes he'd worn his helmet. He's holding the remains of a paddle - or an oar, perhaps, his eyes are turned again to the old ship, souvenir-sharp, as he goes on. A pity. Everything should be left as is for others to see. A man like this would be after the anchor too, I bet, if he thought he could get it away.

I have a sudden vision of him with the anchor on his back, and snort with laughter, bubbling into my regulator. Each rust-crusted link of the anchor chain is as big as my hand, and the anchor itself is sticking up, its grappling arms twice as long as mine, its shaft longer than my body. It's not really an amusing fantasy, after all - that anchor would weigh down my bald head a dead acquaintance for good.

This old wreck is a new wreck, new-found, that is, and the hunters have been rushing, legal or not. We are one of three diving parties here just now, doing our little bit to muddy the water. Our anchor has stirred up mud near the stern, the rope rising aslant the hull to our dive boat, sturdy 23 foot Grew cruiser with ship to shore radio, riding securely somewhere up above us, out of sight. A few minutes ago I swam back down the spine of this wreck and missed seeing it - that's how murky it is. A moment's near-panic, then I led the way back again and the rope hadn't really gone away after all. Even if it had, there were those other boats.

Check the air. Down to 1300. That means my buddy's close to return time; he uses about twice the air I do. He still has 700 lb., but it's pretty wavy up there, and a ladder to climb. We're not far from the boat, but it's a general diving rule to start back at 500 lb.

We got our pressure gauges last spring for Key Largo, diving at the Florida state underwater park (brown and white chequer-board angel-fish as big as dinner plates!) and have wondered how we ever had the nerve to dive without the gauge. It's good to know what you've got, especially when it's air. We have a J-valve on our tanks - this gives you a reserve to get back to the boat - but I'm sure it must be unpleasant to take a breath - and find there isn't any - and a horrid moment while you reach behind and fumble to pull down the little rod to activate that reserve. I've never run out but it used to happen to my buddy all the time.

I want to see the stern - it looks as if it has been blown outward - but my buddy gestures up. We take a last good look at the iron stanchions that stick out at, perhaps, ten-

foot intervals along each side of this ship. At least, I think they're iron, each with a little wheel on the end, they look more like leather, twisted and bent. Later, Eugene said he thought they were part of the rigging, taking ropes for the sails.

Up we go, it's been no time at all. Off again, changing tanks, to the wreck of the Lonny Wolf, lying in 20 feet of water just around the point. Quite a few ships have gone down in these waters, last couple of hundred years. It's the

fall storms that take them, a lot of the time. Brian whets our appetite, he dreams of wrecks not yet discovered, plans to find them too.

My buddy had quite a time getting out of the water - rolled in and went whsst - like a balloon -

he'd rolled on the CO2 cylinder of his safety vest and blown himself up. He doesn't deflate easily. The Lonny Wolf is huge. It takes me a while to realize that she wasn't so fantastically enormous a ship, but the bones are spread out. A good dive,

the water's clear, no souvenirs, no other divers, and the water at 20 feet is warm, comparatively speaking. Huge timbers, spaced so we can see the thickness, four or five inches thick at least the skin of this ship, and the other timbers

huge, imponderable, like barn joists hand-hewn in an old barn.

And to think for an hour this morning we were wreckless! We started out after the Maple Don, a 400 foot steel freighter that went down in the 1920's off Beckwith Island. It was

marked on our chart - and nobody could miss 400 feet of freighter surely, the landward end was only 10' under the surface.

No Maple Don - and six of us straining our eyes. We were still feeling foolish when we stopped

at Hope Island lighthouse and talked to the keeper. A ship can sink more than once, it seems. The big storm last November took the Maple Don down again, and deeper. It'll be a new dive again when she's found. Georgian Bay has only

seemed more or less placid, these past few hours. It's warm and drowsy as we head for home, relaxed about as much as folk can be. It's hard now to imagine wild November seas and darkness and waiting rocks.

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