



C M | Y K

TOLEDO MAGAZINE

THE BLADE, TOLEDO, OHIO ■ SUNDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2005

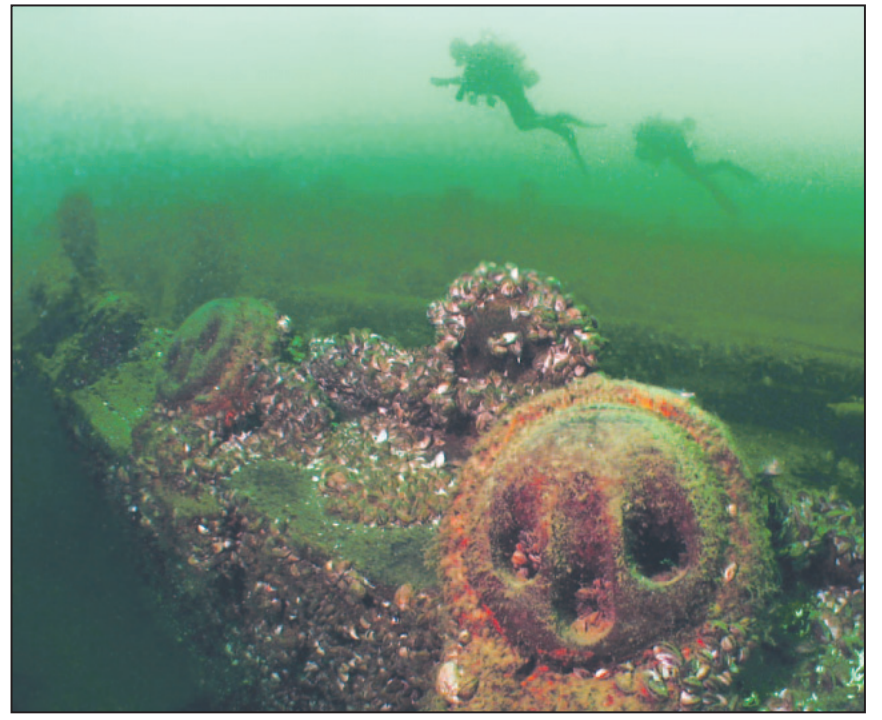
SECTION B, PAGE 6



Five lives were lost in 1909 when the Eber Ward sunk to its grave in the Straits of Mackinac, 142 feet below the surface of Lake Michigan.



Oregon resident Dale Musser takes a breather in the back of a boat on his way to a dive in the Pelee Passage on the Ontario side of Lake Erie.



Deadeyes, which are used to hold sails in place, line the railing of the George A. Marsh at the bottom of Lake Ontario. The schooner sank in a storm in 1917, sending 12 people to their death.



The remains of the William Young were discovered in 2002 on the Lake Huron side of the Straits of Mackinac.



Divers climb aboard their boat after exploring a wooden steamer in the depths of the Straits of Mackinac.

CYAN

MAGENTA

YELLOW

BLACK

What lies beneath

The Great Lakes conceal an underwater museum of shipwrecks

Uh-oh, my knee was wet. Well, maybe just cold. No, definitely wet.

I was about 105 feet under the surface of Lake Ontario, hovering above the decks of the Munson, a dredge vessel that sank more than 100 years ago.

Scattered around the wreckage were hammers and wrenches, all abandoned by the crew, and the bucket used for dredging that was lodged in the sand.

It was a local favorite for divers, our boat captain said, a shipwreck with "spectacular features."

But I couldn't get past the icy sensation creeping along my leg rendering my otherwise impenetrable dry-suit somewhat useless. "I think I have a leak," I wrote on my buddy's underwater slate as we started toward the surface.

The hole was the work of a razor sharp zebra mussel, which left a tiny slice in the material protecting me from Lake Ontario's 48-degree water.

Overall, it was a minor problem for a Great Lakes diver to contend with, and one solved with a bit of duct tape. More importantly, it served as a reminder.

We may be comfortable entering the vast blue world underwater.

But we will always be visitors.

Throughout the summer photographer Andy Morrison and I traveled to various towns along the Great Lakes on a quest to submerge into each of the five bodies of water. We wanted to learn more about the lakes than what the rippling waves on the surface show us.

Deep beneath the choppy surface and enveloped in the depths of the Great Lakes' frosty water, is a unique look at maritime history that can only be explored by scuba diving.

"It's challenging, it's difficult, and it's not always comfortable, but as far as shipwreck diving goes, it is the most rewarding," explained Great Lakes maritime historian and author Cris Kohl.

An estimated 6,000 ships litter the silty, mucky floors of the Great Lakes. While some are nothing more than broken boards, others appear as if they could once

Blade staff writer **Erica Blake** and photographer **Andy Morrison**, both certified divers, set out this summer to dive in each of the five Great Lakes, completing their last dive in Lake Superior just one week ago.



The bell of the Sadie Thompson is 116 feet below Lake Superior near Whitefish Point.

again ride the waves.

Each has a story to tell.

"That's why I like diving shipwrecks," said Dale Musser, owner of Sea Level Scuba in Northwood. "Because you get to see something less than 1 percent of the world gets to see."

And divers like us come away with stories of our own.

In western Lake Erie, we descended to the Willis, a three-masted schooner downed in a collision within its first year sailing. But a wrong turn in the dark, murky waters meant we lost sight of the ship for good. And so, after admitting we wouldn't find the wreck through the algae-filled water, we slowly ascended to the surface without the help of a mooring line.

The July sun penetrated Lake Michigan's crisp waters in the Straits of Mack-

inac, illuminating the decks of the Eber Ward 111 feet deep. Dropping down the line, our first sight of the virtually intact wooden steamer was enough to take our breath away.

Our first descent in Lake Huron found us hovering above only sand, a sure sign that the mooring line we followed to the New York had pulled free. A new plan took us to the nearby Checotah, a schooner-barge built 135 years ago in Toledo.

On the top deck of the George A. Marsh in Lake Ontario, we circled a pile of artifacts, including a kettle and a disintegrating leather boot, eerie reminders of the 12 people who perished when it foundered in a 1917 storm.

And the breaking waves at Whitefish Point hinted at why this area is called the graveyard of Lake Superior. A lifeboat remained aboard the Vienna, an iron ore carrier that sank with all crew surviving, an unusual occurrence in the deadly waters near Paradise, Mich.

Each wreck is unique, and it's not enough just to see the captain's wheel, a ship's bell, or even the crew's toilet. To truly appreciate a shipwreck, you have to learn what happened that sent the vessel to its watery grave.

What was the ship hauling? Did it crash in the night or in a storm? Who was aboard? Did they make it off alive?

"It is only because the water is cold, fresh, and deep that we have an opportunity to experience and study so closely the history of Great Lakes shipping and preserve it for future generations," said Mark Kistner, president of the Michigan Underwater Preserve Council.

But the waters that entomb these ships conceal hundreds more wrecks that are waiting to be explored.

That's where divers like Harold Vandenberg come in. A Kingston, Ont., charter boat captain, he spends his spare time scouring the lake beds with radar for lost wrecks.

"It takes a lot of time and patience. Sometimes you find something, but most of the time you don't," he said. "But when you do, oh what a thrill."

Contact Erica Blake at: eblake@theblade or 419-724-6076.



Cyan Magenta Yellow Black

