

Wrecksploration Formed

by Bill Bleyer



After our first Wrecksploration dive on 6/10/2007, on the Freeport based dive boat "Sea Hawk," back, l to r: Elliot Bertoni, Bill Pfeiffer; front, l to r: Randi Eisen, Russ Lusterman, Adam Altman, Steve Eisen, Steve Scigliano. Photo by Steve Shataka

Even avid Long Island scuba divers get to visit only a fraction of the shipwrecks in local waters, but a new group is trying to change that. There are hundreds of shipwrecks off Long Island in the Atlantic and Block Island Sound, but most divers generally visit just a few dozen of them. Part of the reason is that dive boat captains tend to take paying customers to popular wrecks - ones with artifacts or lobsters - and avoid others that have poor visibility or require a long boat trip in deep water out to the site. Another part of the reason is that many vessels known to have sunk off the island have never been located.

Wrecksploration was formed by divers who want

to encourage captains to look for currently undiscovered wrecks by getting them together with divers willing to pay for being in on the search. "We do dive a lot of the same wrecks, weekend in, weekend out," said the group's founder and president, Adam Altman, a 39-year-old software developer from Holbrook, but he said that his motivation wasn't boredom with familiar sites. Altman, who is also secretary of the Long Island Divers Association and a crew member of the Lido Beach-based dive boat *Eagle's Nest*, said it was more a question of the thrill of exploring new sites.

"If you've ever done an exploration, it's one of the more exciting things you can do in diving," he said. "Whether it's a wreck or not, just getting geared up on the boat knowing that you're going down on something and you don't know what you're going to find down there - it could be a barge, it could be a pile of rocks, it could be an aircraft carrier, you never know - it's a thrill. Most of the explorations I've been on over the years have turned out to be something interesting, whether they're a tugboat, a fishing boat or the ribs of something you can't even identify. It's that unknown feeling that makes it just that much better." Looking for uncharted wrecks, he said, "expands our opportunities for diving."

Treasurer Russ Lusterman, 50, an accountant from Baldwin, added, "Exploration is really good for the dive industry, providing financial support for boats

and shops. People will make an effort to go out for something like that," he said.

Altman said, "Over the years, at least locally, the sport has shrunk." He attributes that, in part, to diving's no longer being seen as exotic and being eclipsed by new extreme sports. It also takes some effort and expense to dive off Long Island, where the wrecks can be in deep water that require a boat ride of several hours in different directions. "It's harder to dive here than it is in the Caribbean," he said.

So Altman began bouncing his idea off other divers and people from the industry over the past few years, got positive feedback and enlisted Long Island Divers Association vice president Randi Eisen, a 49 year-old cell biology researcher from Woodmere, to help create the group in December.

They attracted 24 members (dues for divers are \$20 and \$10 for others who want to support the group or help with the historical research) before the first public program May 3 at Nassau University Medical Center, which attracted almost 100 divers and maritime history buffs. Now there are 64 members. Dan Berg, an author and owner of the dive boat *Wreck Valley*, spoke at the event. He said, "The group is a great idea because it piques the interest in local shipwreck diving. It will be very exciting not only for the dive community, but also

continued on page 10



Your unaided view

ARE YOU AFRAID OF THE DARK?



Your view with FLIR®

Call for a FREE
Price Quote &
Brochure with a
DVD

Let FLIR® Thermal Imaging Cameras and
Hampton Navigation Help you "SEE" in the Dark!

Hampton Navigation, Inc.

Main Office & Showroom
211-2 East Montauk Hwy
Hampton Bays, NY 11946



631-723-6915
www.electronicsforboats.com



**Thermal Imaging Systems
for Pleasure Craft**

FLIR's thermal imaging systems allow you to see in total darkness, with the same technology used by the navy, and may prove to be one of the most essential accessories on your boat.

See Thermal Image Video on your existing Northstar 6000i & 6100i or Raymarine E Series Displays

Fixed & Pan Tilted Models





Wrecksploration Formed

by Bill Bleyer

continued from page 8

for the maritime history community in general.”

Altman pointed out that artifacts, fish and lobsters have become scarcer on the popular sites. “All of these things are more plentiful on a wreck that’s not known. Almost every captain out there has [unexplored GPS] numbers: there’s something that they’ll run over on the way to a dive site and they’ll see a spike on their depth finders. They’ll stop to investigate it or make a note of it. Or they have numbers they got from fishermen - their secret fishing spots.” The group plans to work with captains to set up two trips a month that will explore some of those GPS locations with the divers paying the way.

The first dive was June 10 out of Freeport on the *Sea Hawk* to what has been dubbed the “J&F wreck,” approximately 17 miles south of Jones Inlet in

110 feet of water. The group’s Website reported the outcome: “Over the course of two dives by each of the Wrecksploration members, as well as the *Sea Hawk’s* captains and crew, the layout and distinguishing features of the wreck were assimilated. The site of the wreckage was spread over about 180 feet, and was very low-lying, with most of the bulk of the wreck well-covered with sand. The wreckage was mostly wooden superstructure, with bronze pin construction.

Other findings included a mast on one end of the wreck, and two winches, along with a large pile of anchor chain

on the other. We suspect that we have not yet seen the whole wreck, and that additional parts of it may not have been explored. A consensus agrees that the wreckage is likely that of a schooner barge, built in the middle to late 1800’s. This is indicated by the wooden structure, mast, and the bronze pin construction. Our suspected schooner barge yielded several decent-sized lobsters and a dozen or so scallops, but no significant artifacts.”

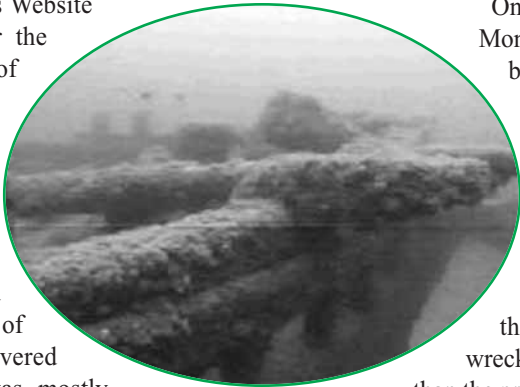
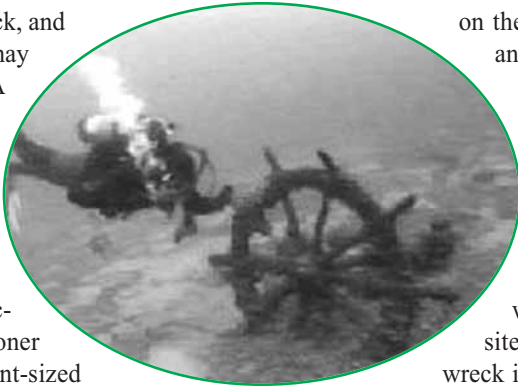
(Read the entire report at www.wrecksploration.org/updates.asp.)

On June 20, the *Sea Turtle* out of Montauk checked out several sites but turned up nothing significant. Three days later, Altman said, “The *Eagle’s Nest* went to a set of numbers they explored last year, which had turned up a large, low-lying steel wreck. Three Wrecksploration members joined this trip to further explore the wreck. It was sanded in even more than the previous year, but the size of the wreckage was quite large, and it yielded nice lobsters and scallops. They were unable to determine the type of vessel, due to the lack of any identifying structures.”

Other dives were scheduled for June 30 on the dive boat *Euphoria* (to 55 feet) and July 2 on the *Sea Turtle* (to 130 feet). “When dive boats take out Wrecksploration charters,” Altman said, “the captains’ secret numbers will stay that way. Captains are very closemouthed with their numbers,” he noted. But other details of what is found will be posted on the group’s website: Wrecksploration.org. Once a wreck is located, the divers and non-diving history buffs will research it and survey the site, calling in marine archaeologists if the wreck turns out to be very old or rare.

As to what they might find, Altman said, “Everything from 17th-century trade ships carrying cargo to pirate ships, several wrecks from World War II that have never been found, tons of work boats from the 60’s and on, probably more barges than you can count, tugboats, fishing boats.” Some of the dives will be shallow to encourage less experienced divers to participate. “You don’t have to have an advanced degree in diving to be able to go out and do this,” Altman said.

Steve Burke, president of the Long Island Divers Association, said, “It’s really a great idea. It would give an opportunity for exploration of wrecks that we know are there but have never been explored and should hopefully serve as a real boon to diving on Long Island. It will give the boat captains an opportunity to explore wrecks that they might not otherwise explore because it wouldn’t be financially feasible.”



Modular Floating Dock and Personal Watercraft Dock





Self Loading Dock and Port Systems









- Modular building block design
- Heavy-duty thick wall polyethylene
- New 8 year flotation warranty

- Attach to EZ Dock, or any dock
- Raised bulkhead for safe docking
- Roller aided launching



AMERICAN RECREATIONAL PRODUCTS

800-663-4096

www.americanrecreational.com