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## **Diving the St. Lawrence River Sept. 2007**

Each dive environment has its own peculiarities whether it's North Atlantic diving, Caribbean diving, cave diving or as we recently found out, river diving. Last weekend, the Adventure SCUBA gang, Lee and Barbara Letwin, Joe Rogers and Mary Gonzales (certified bubble watcher) and Dmitri and Margaret Chamchad (who had sandwiches ready for our group of voracious divers after Saturday's dives) traveled to the 1000 Islands region of the St. Lawrence River to explore some of the many wrecks there. We were based in Brockville, Ontario, at the eastern edge of the 1000 Islands, which stretch for about 40 miles west to Lake Ontario. This is a very scenic river with rocky islands on the surface and rocky shoals underwater.



While the river is a third to a half mile wide in this area, at Brockville the deep shipping channel is squeezed between the Canadian mainland and several islands creating the Brockville Narrows. We were diving right next to this very busy shipping channel.

Great Lakes freighters were moving up and down the channel right next to our dive boat moorings. Since the river flow is directed through this narrow channel there is a fairly strong current to deal with-the peculiarity of

this dive environment.

There are four popular wrecks in the Brockville area, two considered basic dives and two advanced dives-we had the opportunity to dive them all. The water temperature was about 68 degrees from top to bottom and the visibility 40-50 feet. Our dive boat was small but it was a comfortable and convenient vessel to dive from with a small cabin to get out of the wind, broad benches which made it easy to get in and out of equipment and a dive platform at the stern with a good ladder. Gord was captain and Chris was crew. They



had extensive experience diving the area, gave good dive briefings, were very helpful with equipment and were simply a couple of nice guys.



Our first dives were Saturday afternoon and we all did a dive on the Henry C. Daryaw, a steel freighter which struck a shoal in 1941, capsized and rests upside down in a rock-walled channel at a depth of 95 feet. There is a fairly swift current, which makes this an advanced dive. Once in the water you need to pull yourself against the current down to the wreck. You arrive at the stern and then drop down to the bottom and pull yourself along and under the wreck. After our surface interval we did our second dive on the Lillie Parsons, a two masted schooner that sank in 1877. The “Lillie” was carrying 500 tons of coal when she was pushed up against Sparrow Island by a sudden squall. This let her take on water and she capsized. The “Lillie” rests upside down on a narrow ledge in about 40 feet of water. Just off the ledge the bottom drops precipitously away into the 180 foot deep shipping channel.

After the dive, Joe and Lee had a set of tanks refilled and did a night dive on the Robert Gaskin. The Gaskin was a double masted wooden barge that was converted to a salvage barge. In 1889 while working to salvage a train ferry, a pontoon lashed to the ferry was being filled with steam to raise the ferry. The pontoon broke loose and like a buoyant torpedo put a huge hole in the Gaskin sending her to the bottom in just minutes. She sits in about 60 feet of water just off the Brockville waterfront.

On Sunday morning we did our first dive on the wreck of the 128 foot tugboat Muscallonge. The “Muskie” was the largest river tug of her time and while towing a barge from Quebec caught fire, burned to the waterline and exploded. Her remains sit in 95 feet of water. Her starboard hull has a 20 foot relief, which lies at right angles to the current. Once you get to the bottom there is little current to deal with as you explore the remains of the boiler and steam engine. We finished our dive weekend with a second dive on the “Lillie”.



Brockville is a 6 hour drive from Philly, the 1000 Islands area is very scenic and there are river tours for the non-diver. The water temperature is pleasant, the visibility good and the wrecks are interesting. All in all a fine weekend dive destination.

