

The weather forecast for the weekend of October 18, 2008 was delightful. A great fall weekend. Winds were to be light and gradually picking up.

Eight divers from the Saginaw area headed for Little Traverse Bay in Petoskey.

Among the divers were six members of the Saginaw Underwater Explorers along with two friends. Club members were Mike Fabish, Jim Jesselaitis, Scott Thompson, Tim Hasting, Dave Sommers and Greg Prenzler. Joining the group were Mike Prenzler, Greg's nephew and Rick Hardy a Grand Blanc diver and friend of Greg.

The story actually begins on August 12, 1962 when a crucifix was placed in Little Traverse Bay, about 1,200 feet off the break wall in Petoskey. It was intended as a memorial to all fatal diving accidents. On November 1, 1964 members of the Saginaw Underwater Explorers placed a plaque at the crucifix. More were added over the years.

A photo of the plaque can be seen on the website history page, November 2, 1964.

In 1986 the crucifix was moved closer to shore. Not all of the plaques were moved with it.

In the summer of 2007 Mike and Justin Fabish found a mention of the crucifix in a diving book and went to look for it. The marble statue had a large amount of marine growth on it.

Over the winter club members discussed making a trip and cleaning the crucifix.

Last May, club members ventured north and spent two days scrubbing the growth off. Emmet County historian and Sheriff diver Dennis Jessick provided valuable information and support. There is a link to a video of the crucifix cleaning on the photo page of our website.

Over the summer discussion turned to a fall trip to Petoskey and an attempt to locate the original site and perhaps locating our plaque.

Jessick was able to provide charts of the original location.

Before heading north on Friday, October 17, Greg Prenzler presented his wife with two bouquets of roses. It was their wedding anniversary.

Greg towed his trailer and Tim Hastings brought along his boat.

The group camped at the Petoskey State Park, splitting the sleeping arrangements between the trailer and a rustic cabin in the park.

Saturday morning dawned with below freezing temperatures, calm wind and heavy fog.

Tim's boat held all 8 divers who had dressed on shore. It was less than 1,000 yards to the coordinates of the old crucifix site. The crucifix had been placed on the edge of a drop off in about 60 feet of water. At the coordinates it was almost 100 feet deep. An adjustment was made to dive along the drop off.

The first group of divers, Fabish, Hardy and both Prenzler's headed easterly along the bottom. The bottom was clear and sandy with no vegetation. Visibility was about 50 feet and the divers spread out along the drop off. They did not locate the crucifix site but found the transom of a boat.

The next group of Hastings, Thompson, Jesselaitis and Sommers headed westerly. The diving was easy but with little to see, mostly sand and a steep drop off. Nothing was located. Between both groups, about 800 yards of the drop off area was searched.

While the original site was not located, the obvious position for the crucifix was eliminated. It was felt that the entire sand bank / drop-off had probably moved over the past 46 years. Another search in deeper water may be needed. The old plaques may be lost forever in the shifting sands.

After a shore lunch and swap-out of tanks the group motored to the crucifix. Since it wasn't buoyed it took a while to locate the site only a few hundred yards from shore.

The boat anchor was attached to a mooring chain on the bottom.

All 8 divers were able to get time in to clean the crucifix and plaques with scrub brushes. Visibility was still about 50 feet and with a depth of only 20 feet several divers were able to get in over an hour underwater.

Greg Prenzler demonstrated his outdoor cooking skills Saturday evening. Jesselaitis brought along some venison tenderloins and potatoes for the grill. Everyone had plenty to eat on a cold, star filled night. Many stories were told around the blazing campfire.

Sunday dawned overcast and windy. The forecast was for 25 knot winds and it looked like the weatherman had it right.

The decision was made to head for the Keuka in Lake Charlevoix.

Shortly after noon the group arrived at the boat launch in Charlevoix and was delighted to notice the wreck still had a mooring buoy on it.

The Keuka was a 172 foot three masted schooner barge. It was built in 1889. It is about 25 feet to the deck and lies on a flat sand bottom.

The winds howling and the white caps were picking up on the trip out. The wreck lies about one-half mile from shore.

The wreck is wide open with hundreds of bass. Everyone had a chance to explore the wreck that has been rumored to have once been a speakeasy.

The entire group agreed it was a great weekend for diving.

By David Sommers

