

Grand Traverse Bay Underwater Preserve

Code of Practice for Wreck Diving

Mission Statement

The GTBUP is committed to conserving our underwater heritage for historical and scientific research for future generations of divers and non-divers to enjoy. The GTBUPC achieves this and the safety of divers by promoting sound and responsible practice through its training program. The GTBUPC encourages participation by its members in research and adoption of wrecks for research and monitoring purposes.

Introduction

Although wrecks are found throughout the world's seas, it is in Lake Michigan waters that wreck diving is especially popular. Every wreck found has a history, including its sinking, and the curious diver will want to know more. But at the same time, we want to preserve the remains of what has disintegrated over time. To do that, the GTBUPC will publish a Preserve handbook with pictures showing the current state of the wreck and its history. Wrecks are exciting to explore and also make great habitats for fish and other aquatic life. That is why the GTBUPC is lobbying for the intentional sinking of a vessel within the Preserve.

Most of the wrecks dived around our Great Lakes were associated with collisions or during the worst time of the year for weather, (October through December) and is now an important part of our history. Not just the history of battles and wars, but also of marine/naval architecture and technology. It is fascinating to learn about the development of vessels, which have evolved according to social needs, and the progress of technology dating as far back from prehistoric Native Americans.

The lakebed holds the remains of many tragedies, for the sinking of a vessel is often accompanied by loss of life. These sunken vessels still claim lives - the lives of divers inadequately prepared for difficult dives. Wreck diving, particularly when wrecks are penetrated, requires a high level of experience and advanced skill training available from clubs within the GTBUP. Preparation and planning is important and this includes research and local knowledge. Research is always the best way of fully appreciating a wreck, perhaps identifying its name, how it was sunk and understanding the lives of those on board.

There are divers who see a wreck as an area of conquest; they see a remaining porthole as something to take home. Objects removed will deteriorate if they are not properly conserved. These "souvenirs" almost always end up rusting away forgotten in a garage or garden. But more importantly, taking items from wrecks means that there is nothing left of interest for other divers to see. Wrecks are not a renewable resource and the GTBUPC promotes consideration for the majority of divers who want to visit and appreciate intact wrecks. Contemporary standards of behavior are replacing former unsociable diving activities and only if wrecks are respected will there be anything for future generations of divers to enjoy.

Guidelines and Code of Conduct

Important archaeological evidence will be destroyed by thoughtlessness. If you think that an object or wreck may be of historical importance, leave it where it lies as it may be fragile. Record its position (depth, GPS, etc) and contact the GTBUPC for advice.

The Michigan Underwater Preserve System was established in 1980 through the Michigan National Resource and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA; M.C.L. 324.776101 et seq.) and is/are managed in conjunction with the Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries, Michigan Historical Center, as authorized under section 761 (Aboriginal Records and Antiquities of NREPA). Unless you have been approved by the controlling authority, divers who actively remove items from wrecks for commercial/private gain are diving beyond the limits, responsibility and purpose of the GTBUPC.

Many wrecks (worldwide) of military vessels or aircraft are the last resting-places of those who gave their lives in the Great Wars. War graves should not be entered or interfered with, as it is an offense under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986. Imagine the distress that it causes relatives and comrades of those who died. It is like damaging or desecrating a churchyard. Remember that other sunken vessels, such as trawlers or merchant ships, may also be graves from peacetime tragedies and should also be respected.

Other wrecks may have toxic material or munitions on board. As well as injuring yourself, think of the danger you are putting your family, friends and others in if you bring hazardous objects ashore. The acquisition or possession of munitions is a criminal offence under the Firearms Act 1968. For your own safety, it is illegal to dive on some wrecks that contain dangerous material.

Wrecks also provide a habitat for marine life which destructive diving or careless anchoring may ruin. Use available fixed shot-lines where possible. If you need to use your own line or anchor, ensure that they are secured off the wreck wherever possible. Use safe diving techniques that will not spoil the site for other divers, whatever their interest.

Clubs and groups of divers are now adopting particular wrecks for research purposes. Some of these divers take part in detailed structural surveys, some undertake historical research and others study the marine life and monitor changes of the ecology of the wreck. The GTBUPC promotes this positive attitude towards wrecks and the environment. As a rule, take nothing but pictures and leave nothing but bubbles. If you survey a wreck for scientific/historic research purposes, you must first notify the GTBUPC with a letter of intention. The GTBUPC will review and offer assistance whenever possible, it is strongly encouraged that the requesting party remove all surveying items and leave the wreck as you found it. Items left behind will be confiscated and turned over to the controlling agency for further action.

Scuba Divers need to:

- Get appropriate training before you enter wrecks.
- Research the wreck site before diving on it.
- Leave wrecks intact for other divers to see.
- Know the law - if you must remove an object, you must report it to the controlling authority.
- Respect war and other graves beneath the lake.
- Take care on wrecks that contain munitions or toxic materials and leave such materials alone. Acquiring or possessing munitions without authority is illegal.
- Protect the environment.
- Respect your fellow diver.

Look after yourself and look after the environment, so that wrecks may remain, not only as history today, but also as history for future generations.