

Wooden beam could be detached part of shipwreck

June 19 2013, by John Flesher

A wooden beam that has long been the focus of the search for a 17th century shipwreck in northern Lake Michigan was not attached to a buried vessel as searchers had suspected, but still may have come from the elusive Griffin or some other ship, archaeologists said Wednesday.

Shipwreck hunter Steve Libert discovered a 10.5-foot (3.2-meter) section of the timber jutting from the lake bed twelve years ago in an area where he was convinced that the Griffin, commanded by the French explorer Rene Robert Cavelier de la Salle, sank in 1679. French experts who inspected the beam in recent days said it appeared to be a bowsprit—a spur or pole that extends from a vessel's stem—that was hundreds of years old.

Crews have been digging beside the timber, where sonar readings indicated that one or more objects that together exceeded 40 feet (12 meters) long were submerged in mud. Libert and other expedition leaders believed they might be the hull of the Griffin, and that the excavation would find a connection between it and the presumed bowsprit.

But on Tuesday, as a diver was widening the pit, the timber began wobbling. [Archaeologists](#) and other expedition leaders decided to take it down instead of trying to stabilize it, fearing it was a safety risk. So the diver eased it to the lake bed after checking beneath and discovering that it wasn't attached to another object, but simply had been embedded in the tightly packed sediments.

Even though no other [wreckage](#) was found, project manager Ken Vrana said there's still a good chance it is located not far away. With the timber no longer in place, crews stepped up their dredging operation in hopes of reaching a hard surface that a probing device has indicated is 18 to 20 feet (6 meters) down.

"It could be that the ship is very close to this area, but it is impossible to say for sure at this point," said Michel L'Hour, director of France's Department of Underwater Archaeological Research and a shipwreck expert.

Meanwhile, expedition leaders were talking with state officials about what to do with the [timber](#). Options include leaving it on the lake bottom—concealed to avoid theft or vandalism—or bringing it to shore, which would require expert preservation treatment.

© 2013 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Wooden beam could be detached part of shipwreck (2013, June 19) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-06-wooden-detached-shipwreck.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--