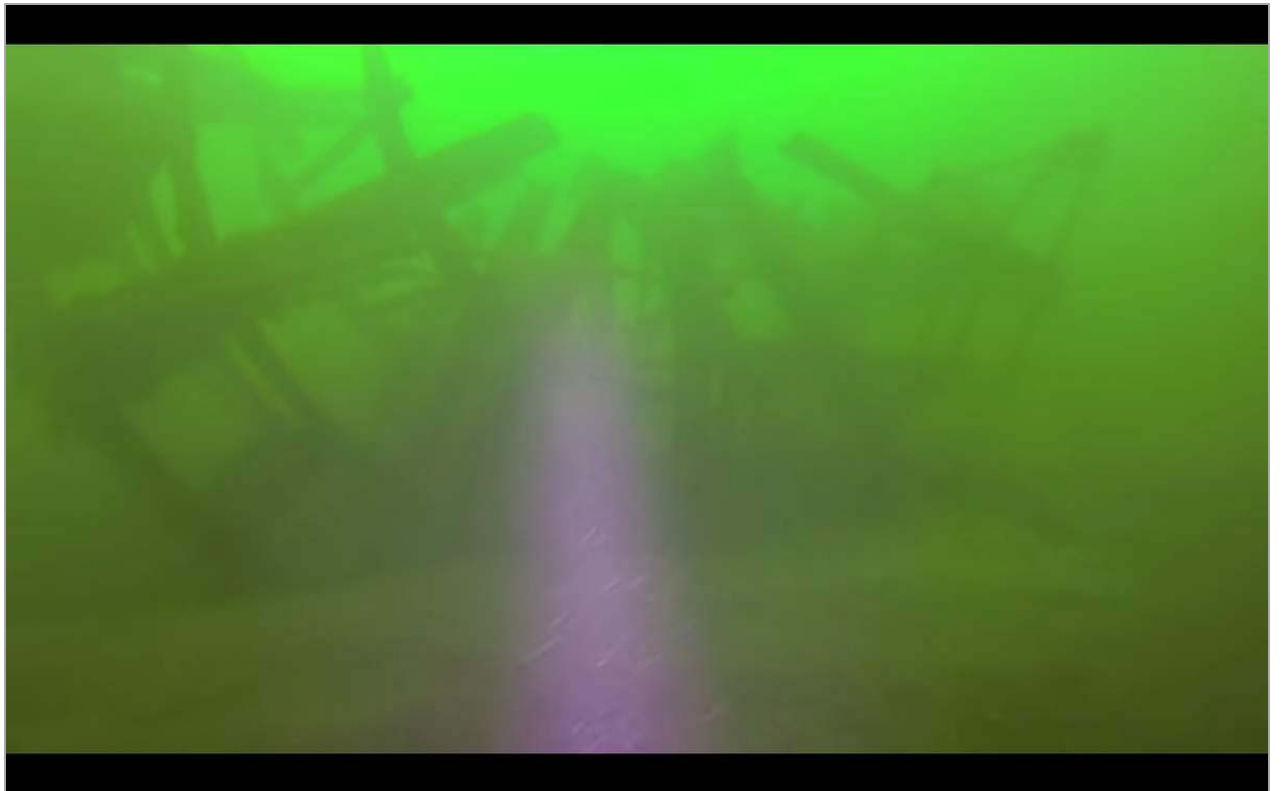


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# Searching for the 'Old Mount'

By TIM CAMERATO | Jul 20, 2015

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*Photo by: YOUTUBE SCREEN SHOT*

THIS IS A PADDLE WHEEL that was part of the old Steamer Mount Washington. It was one of three sections of the boat found recently by diver Hans Hug.

**LACONIA** — When Lakes Region diver Hans Hug punctured his eardrum with a cotton swab early last summer, he knew his time in the water would come to a temporary halt.

That proposition wasn't easy, considering what Hug was hunting for – the “Old Mount,” a paddlewheel steamer that once, before it burned in 1939, traversed Lake Winnepesaukee.

Equipped with a side scanning sonar unit, Hug didn't give up. He searched the lake until September, when the sonar picked up something big. Since Hug still couldn't dive, Tuftonboro diver Brad Swain was enlisted for the job.

“He comes back very excited and goes ‘That’s a piece of the original Mount Washington,’” Hug said.



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For the first time in about 75 years, someone had laid eyes on a piece of the Mount – a roughly 50-foot section of the vessel with its still-attached railing and deck cleats.

Swain also reported the piece was sheared “from the violent force of explosives,” evidence of dynamite used break apart the ship after the fire. The piece was also “charred, just toast” after the fire.

“It was big, it was burnt, it was blown,” Hug said. It had to be the Mount.

### **Tenure in the water**

Hug didn't begin his diving career searching for the Mount Washington. He got his start in 1988, when his brother took up scuba diving as a hobby and convinced him to give it a shot.

“I took to it immediately,” Hug said, and started with lobster and scallop dives off the coast of Massachusetts.

“I've always liked history, so when I learned to dive, I started looking for diving in places of historical interest,” Hug said. That search expanded his waters from Massachusetts to all over New England, as he searched for bottles, arrowheads, guns, ink wells and old ceramics.

He also started his own diving company, Sonar Search and Recovery, based in Exeter.

Being familiar with Lake Winnepesaukee starting with visits in the 1970s, he began diving in the lake about six years ago.

With Winnepesaukee's vast history, Hug was soon visiting wrecks including a 17-foot steel-hulled steamer, a 50-foot pleasure boat, barges varying in size from 26 to 60 feet and recreational Chris-Crafts.

Last year Hug found a twin engine Correct Craft in Wolfeboro. The vintage 1920s boat still had its engines attached.

### **The 'Mount'**

Hug said none of those compare to the Mount Washington. Along with the 50-foot section, he also found a 30-foot span of deck and one of the vessel's paddle wheels.

When Hug passed over the wheel with his sonar, he said he didn't know what he was seeing but it was producing a very strong return.

“If you give me a body on sonar, a car on sonar, an airplane, a motorboat, and outboard, I would recognize it,” Hug said. “A paddle wheel stuck upright in the mud like a donut on edge? That, I was not expecting.”

About four weeks ago, Hug got the chance to dive to the paddle wheel. As he was descending, it came into the view and he came to a stop, telling himself, “Oh my god. I have a paddle wheel to the original Mount Washington.”

“It was fabulous,” Hug said. “Without question, the coolest thing I've ever found in Winnepesaukee.”

Like the other two pieces, Hug said the wheel appeared to have suffered burns and been sheared off the ship. It was still in its steel frame, though, with most of its two-inch thick paddles in place.

## Preserving history

Being a witness to history, Hug certainly understands the responsibility of his find. Aside from a close group of divers, no one knows where the ship is.

“If they have, they’ve never said anything about it,” Hug said.

He said the only other inkling that someone else might have been to the site is a post made about four years ago in the Winnepesaukee Forum, where a diver claimed to have found a paddle wheel. Hug emailed the person, but never received a response.

“Maybe what I found is the same paddle wheel, but I have to tell you, it’s so far off shore and in such an odd location, I would be surprised if it was the same one,” Hug said.

He’s happy with letting the spot stay a secret, hoping to save the ship from those who would rip it apart and destroy history.

“It’s sort of like having an old painting. You don’t leave it in your living room. You put it away where it’s safe and sound and it’ll never get stolen and abused,” Hug said. “It’s that valuable. At least to me, it’s that valuable.”

People can still visit the ship electronically. Hug has placed videos on YouTube of dives to each of the sites, which can be viewed at:

[tinyurl.com/owwnhej](http://tinyurl.com/owwnhej) (50-foot piece)

[tinyurl.com/puwnm8l](http://tinyurl.com/puwnm8l) (decking)

[tinyurl.com/qgb5e4l](http://tinyurl.com/qgb5e4l) (the paddle wheel).

Hug also enjoys hearing about new places to dive and learning about New England history that might not be written down. People who have a story to tell or can suggest underwater history can contact him at [info@sonarsar.com](mailto:info@sonarsar.com).

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