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Monday, November 10, 2003

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11/9/03 BBC Russia damaged in MacArthur Lock

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By SCOTT BRAND/*The Evening News*

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SAULT STE. MARIE -- A miscalculation in the Soo Locks damaged the BBC Russia on Saturday afternoon providing a Lake Superior State University sophomore, and self-described boat nerd, with a first-hand look at the carnage.

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Scott Best, a personal computer specialist major out of Menominee, said he was on hand to photograph the BBC Russia as it made its maiden voyage through the Soo Locks.

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"I knew it was its first trip, otherwise I probably wouldn't have even gone down there," he explained.

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Best added there was little visible damage above the water's surface. Most of the impact, he said, was absorbed by the ship's underwater bulbous hull when it struck the wall of the MacArthur Lock. The U.S. Coast Guard kept the damaged ship in the lock for approximately two hours before it was released.

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The knowledgeable Best said the BBC Russia is one of many ships under the BBC banner. Although it bears the name Russia, it is registered in Cyprus, and has no relation to the Soviet Union.

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The latest edition of Know Your Ships does not include this particular vessel, but does list 11 other BBC boats including America, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Finland, Holland, Iceland, Japan, Norway and Scotland. All of these ships are listed as general cargo vessels sailing under the Briese Schiffahrts GMBH & Co. Kg, Leer, Germany banner.

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A spokesman for the U.S. Coast Guard confirmed Best's account of the events, filling in some extra details in the process on Saturday evening.

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Likening it to a car crash, the spokesman said the Saturday afternoon accident was "more like a fender-bender than a collision." The BBC Russia was entering the MacArthur Lock at a very slow speed when it struck the wall of the lock. An initial review shows the boat did sustain a dent of unspecified size in the bow.

The BBC Russia is currently moored in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario and will likely remain at that location for at least a week -- until the full extent of the damage can be verified.

The coast guard official said he did not know what, if any, damage was sustained to the Locks, but he quickly added that shipping traffic was continuing to pass through the MacArthur Lock.

There were no injuries in the Saturday afternoon mishap.

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