

THE BLIZZARD OF JANUARY 7-8, 1996

The Richmond International Airport Recorded 13.4 inches of Snow from January 6th to the 9th.

This storm was incredibly massive and truly historic in its scope as many all-time snow records were broken over a large area. Records included 24.9 inches in Roanoke, Virginia; 30.7 inches in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; 27.8 inches Newark, New Jersey; and 14.4 inches as far away as Cincinnati, Ohio. The snowfall at National Airport measured 17.1 inches while the snowfall at Dulles accumulated to 24.6 inches. Other snowfall totals included 21 inches in Fredericksburg, Virginia; 22.5 inches in Baltimore, Maryland; and 25.7 inches in Rockville, Maryland. Generally snowfall amounts between Washington and Boston were between 17 to 30 inches.

The storm began on Saturday the 6th and continued at an amazingly steady rate until mid-afternoon Sunday, January 7th. By that time, 13 to 17 inches of snow had accumulated in most areas with up to 20 inches in the distant western suburbs. The snow bands were accompanied by lightning, thunder and whiteout conditions at times. Monday morning January 8th, the snow squalls had tapered off leaving the Washington metro area buried in 15 to 25 inches of snow.

The blizzard of 1996 was just the first of 3 snowstorms to hit the Washington area during the snowy week of January 7-12. On the 9th an Alberta clipper storm center passed directly over the region, dropping another quick shot of surprising heavy snowfall in the area. The western suburbs were dusted with only an inch of snow while up to 6 inches of snow fell in eastern areas such as Prince George's and Charles Counties. January 10th was a nice sunny day with high temperatures reaching a rather balmy 34 degrees at National Airport. The third and final snow took place on the 12th as a quick moving coastal storm dropping 5 to 12 inches of snow across the region.

On January 18th there was an extremely rapid thaw brought on by temperatures to 62 degrees along with high dew point temperatures and heavy rain. (p. 96-101 Washington Weather Book 2002 by Ambrose, Henry, Weiss)

I have never seen snow melt so rapidly in my life. We lost a foot of snow in about eight hours during the night. Many grassy areas appeared in the morning and snow piles that were left appeared to be "steaming" in high dew point temperatures. This sudden melt of snow sent the Potomac River surging out of its banks. The Potomac River approached levels not seen since flooding caused by tropical storm Agnes in 1972. Also many small streams and creeks caused flooding from the rain and the extremely quick snow melt.

Map prepared by Barbara M. Watson

BLIZZARD OF '96 SNOWFALL TOTALS

