

JANUARY 1996: The new year commenced with cold and stormy weather across the Washington/Baltimore area. Outbreaks of cold Canadian air combined with an active and moisture laden subtropical jet produced the snowiest month since February 1979 in Washington. The most significant event was the "Blizzard of 1996" on the 6th-8th which dumped up to 2 feet of snow across most of the local area, close to 3 feet on the far northern and western suburbs, and up to 4 feet on southeastern West Virginia. DCA officially observed 17.1", the largest single-storm snowfall since the "President's Day" snowstorm in February 1979 (18.7") and the fourth largest total since snowfall records began in 1888. Both IAD (24.5") and BWI (22.5") recorded over 20 inches, the largest single-storm snowfall total on record at IAD and the second largest at BWI. In addition, IAD observed a 24-hour record snow amount (19.8") on the 7th. Strong wind gusts generated blowing and drifting snow and combined with readings in the twenties to produce bitterly cold wind chills. The storm left the city virtually paralyzed nearly all week and forced the closure of the three commercial airports, businesses, federal government and schools. An additional snowfall of 2-7 inches on the 9th and another 5-11 inches on the 12th brought weekly snowfall totals to as much as three feet in some areas. Many of the far northern and western suburbs of Virginia and Maryland recorded weekly snow totals of more than 40 inches. While no additional snow fell during the remainder of the month, stormy conditions continued to affect the region. A heavy rain, accompanied by mild conditions and isolated thunderstorms on the 18th and 19th, resulted in rapid snowmelt and runoff, leading to widespread severe flooding in much of the Northeast, including from the Shenandoah Valley to the local area. Water levels along the Potomac rose above flood stage, resulting in the worst flooding since Hurricane Agnes in June 1972. In addition, much of the towpath and berms along the C&O Canal were washed away by flood waters and according to press reports damage estimates were in the millions. Early in the month, more than an inch of rain fell across the local area on the 2nd, and coupled with several other precipitation events, yielded the wettest January since 1979 at DCA, BWI and IAD.

Temperatures were near to slightly below normal across most of the local area, with the largest monthly departure reported at DCA (-1.7°F). The core of the cold weather occurred around and shortly after the blizzard with readings remaining below freezing from the 6th-12th. Lows fell to near zero at many locations and included the first subzero reading of the Winter at IAD (-2°F on the 9th). While temperatures generally remained at or below normal for the rest of the month, there were periodic and short-lived mild spells as strong frontal systems frequented the region. Highs in the sixties were observed at some locations on the 19th (61°F at DCA and 62°F at IAD) prior to the passage of a strong cold front, and by the morning of the 20th readings had plummeted between 30°F and 40°F across the area. Readings in the fifties were common on the 24th and again on the 27th only to be followed by significantly colder weather the next day.

JANUARY 1996 WEATHER STATISTICS FOR THE WASHINGTON/BALTIMORE AREA:

Station Location	Temperatures (°F)					Extreme/Day		Precipitation (In)			
	AvMx	AvMn	AvgT	NmIT	DepNm	MaxT	MinT	Total	Norm	DepNm	Snow
National (DCA)	40.2	25.5	32.9	34.6	-1.7	62/19	14/11	5.01	2.72	+2.29	23.8
Baltimore (BWI)	39.5	23.9	31.7	31.8	-0.1	59/27	6/11	6.80	3.05	+3.75	32.6
Dulles (IAD)	39.0	20.9	30.0	30.6	-0.6	62/19	-2/9	5.61	2.70	+2.91	30.9
Ft. Belvoir (DAA)	40.5	23.3	31.9	32	0	59/18*	11/9	7.74	2.8	+4.9	31.0
Andrew AFB (ADW)	42.1	26.0	34.0	34	0	61/19	12/11	5.02	3.1	+1.9	28.0

Other occurrences: * January 19.

LOOKING AHEAD TO FEBRUARY: Snowy January = Snowy February?

After the snowiest January since 1935 and the snowiest month since 1979, our attention turns to February. Will the snowy weather continue? Below is a list of the 10 snowiest Januaries on record in Washington (including 1996) and the corresponding February snow totals (where applicable). [February average snowfall at DCA: 6.3"]

<u>Year</u>	<u>January Snowfall (In.)</u>	<u>February Snowfall (In.)</u>
1922	31.5	3.0
1935	24.4	3.5
1996	23.8	?
1918	22.6	1.5
1966	21.3	6.9
1987	20.8	10.3
1892	20.5	7.5
1925	18.0	T
1912	16.9	0.5
1904	16.5	1.8