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Hurricanes- Part 4: Devastating Hurricanes of the 1990s and Early 2000s [1]

Hurricanes

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See also: Wet Year [2]; Tornadoes [3]

Part 1: Introduction [4]; Part 2: Hurricanes in Colonial and Nineteenth-Century North Carolina[5]; Part 3: Twentieth-Century Hurricanes [6]; Part 4: Devastating Hurricanes of the 1990s and Early 2000s

Part 4: Devastating Hurricanes of the 1990s and Early 2000s

In the 1990s, North Carolina experienced another decade marred by powerful hurricanes and destruction throughout the state. The first of the storms to strike the state was Hurricane Emily [7], a category three that hit Hatteras [8] Island on 31 Aug. 1993. While no lives were lost during the storm, an estimated $13 million of damage was done to the 17-mile stretch that absorbed the brunt of the hurricane force. Three years after Emily hit Hatteras Island, another storm, Bertha [9], struck the coast in July. The worst of the storm was focused on Topsail Island [10], and a number of homes were destroyed there. In the eastern counties as a whole, a tremendous amount of overall damage was caused by the storm, with surveys indicating that more than 1,100 homes were destroyed and another 4,000 damaged.

Just a few months after Bertha hit the coast in 1996, North Carolina suffered another, more devastating blow. Hurricane Fran was an enormous, category three storm that carved a destructive path through the center of the state, starting in the southeastern corner and continuing deep inland as far as the Raleigh [11]-Durham [12]-Chapel Hill area. Strong winds and heavy flooding affected much of the state, 24 deaths were reported, and damages were estimated at $5 billion. In 1998 North Carolina was hit again, this time by Hurricane Bonnie, a category two storm that hit Onslow County [13] on 27 August. While floods and heavy rainfall affected some of the eastern part of the state, Bonnie was relatively calm when compared to earlier storms such as Fran. Still, Bonnie was responsible for a few deaths and economic losses estimated at $480 million.

The year 1999 proved to be significant in North Carolina hurricane history. In late August, the state was struck by Hurricane Dennis [14], a meandering storm that fluctuated between category two strength and tropical storm classification. While not a particularly strong storm, Dennis caused extensive damage to crops and homes in the coastal region of the state. Just two weeks after Dennis first came ashore, Hurricane Floyd [15] began to tear through North Carolina. Touching down at Cape Fear on 16 Sept. 1999, Floyd was a category four storm that would overshadow Hurricane Fran [16] as the state's most devastating disaster in recent memory. After moving along the New Hanover [17] shoreline, Floyd moved inland, crossing over Pender [18] and Onslow [13] Counties. Eventually, Floyd passed over New Bern and Washington as well. While damage was done by wind and the tides that Floyd brought with it, the real danger was a result of the enormous amounts of rainfall that accumulated and eventually flooded a vast majority of the coastal region. In all, a total of 63,000 houses were flooded and 7,300 homes destroyed. In North Carolina alone, 66 counties were declared disaster areas, damages totaled between $5.5 and $6 billion, and the storm claimed a devastating 52 lives.

In September 2003 Hurricane Isabel [19], a category two storm, cut through North Carolina and other states, causing massive destruction to crops and property and taking 38 lives. North Carolina agricultural concerns were particularly hurt, with more than $152 million in damage caused to crops as well as farm structures and equipment. On 3 Aug. 2004 the center of Hurricane Alex [20], a category two storm, came within ten miles of the Outer Banks, hitting Hatteras and Ocracoke Island [21] the hardest and causing $5 million in flood and wind damage, $2.4 million of that in Dare County [22]. Hurricane Ivan [23], which made landfall in Alabama in September 2004, passed over the western portion of North Carolina, leading to eight deaths and causing flood damage to many roads, including the Blue Ridge Parkway [24] and part of Interstate 40 in Haywood County [25].

Educator Resources:

Teaching Natural Disasters Lesson Plan [26], State Archives of North Carolina

Reference:

Jay Barnes, *North Carolina's Hurricane History* (3rd ed., 2001).

National Hurricane Center, National Weather Service: http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/ [27]

Video Credit:

Hurricane Fran, Carolina Beach, NC. Video courtesy of Jim Leonard, 2007. Available fromhttp://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_eFxBoKqk0&feature=relmfu [28] (accessed August 17, 2012).

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