

The Great Blizzard of 1947 was a record-breaking snowfall that began on Christmas without prediction and brought the northeastern United States to a standstill. The snowstorm was described as the worst blizzard after 1888 and was said to have fallen about 10 million tons of snow. The storm was not accompanied by high winds, but the snow fell silently and steadily. By the time it stopped on December 26, measurement of the snowfall reached 26.4 inches (67.1 cm) in Central Park in Manhattan. Meteorological records indicate that warm moisture arising from the Gulf Stream fed the storm's energy when it encountered its cold air and greatly increased the precipitation. Automobiles and buses were stranded in the streets, subway service was halted, and parked vehicles initially buried by the snowfall were blocked further by packed mounds created by snow plows once they were able to begin operation. Once trains resumed running, they ran twelve hours late. Seventy-seven deaths are attributed to the blizzard.

Drifts exceeded ten feet and finding places to place snow from plowing became problematic, creating snow piles that exceeded twelve feet. In Manhattan some of the snow was dumped into the sewers, where it melted in the warm waste water flowing to the rivers. When possible it was dumped directly into the Hudson River and the East River. Most suburban areas did not have such nearby alternatives to stacking the snow up. Low temperatures that winter led to the snowfall remaining on the ground until March of the next year.

Communities in New Jersey among the Watchung Mountains and beyond, received the same or greater snowfall depths that created similar problems, which became threatening because trucks that carried coal to heat the majority of homes could not be dispatched to replenish diminishing supplies. Food supplies ran low and resourcefulness in moving people to alternative shelter and distribution of supplies became essential. Communities with central gas connections for heating gave shelter for those who could reach those homes and facilities. Although many homes in the region had fireplaces, few had generous supplies of wood because fireplaces only were used occasionally.

Connecticut and upstate New York were affected as well as most of the Mid-Atlantic region. With no weather reports generated from stations along its path, the storm was not predicted and it advanced over land from the Atlantic Ocean in a pattern that is the opposite of most snowstorms for the area.

This snowstorm arrived without advance warning because weather patterns for the northeastern United States generally flow from the west to the east following the prevailing winds. Numerous weather stations along that typical path provide reports that are used for predictions in advance of storms moving eastward. There are no weather stations in the Atlantic Ocean. This storm progressed westward and affected the Great Plains shortly afterward, but the effect of moisture from the Gulf Stream feeding the volume of snow lessened as the distance from the warm water flow increased.

See December 26, 1947 for more information!