

Early Autumn Snow in Northern Virginia and Maryland
By Herb Close – One Mile SW of Manchester, MD

This month will be remembered for the record October snowstorm that hit northern Maryland, northern Virginia, West Virginia northeastward to Maine. Temperatures were borderline at the surface in these areas so elevation very much determined how much snow you got. The high I had on the 29th of 38 degrees was a carryover from the night before. At my station temperatures dropped to the low 30's by morning and stayed there all day. Temperatures here were mostly around 31 to 32 degrees during the snowstorm and at times peaked out at 33 degrees. The night before I had light rain with temperatures falling from the upper 30's to the low 30's. At 5:13 AM, I still had a steady light rain with a temperature of about 34 degrees. By 5:50am, the steady rain had already changed over to moderate wet snow with moderate flakes. The temperature was around 33 degrees and falling. Snow was starting to stick to deck banister.

At 6:05am, the deck banister and top of my car is dusted white.

Moderate wet snow with moderate flakes is falling. At 6:37 AM, Heavy wet snow was falling with moderate to good size flakes. Up to a quarter inch snow was on the deck banister with 0.2" snow had fallen. There was a dusting on the grass now and the grass was turning white. I had to go to work at the supermarket in Hampstead about 4-5 miles SSE of my station. Some heavy snow fell at Hampstead between 10am and 12 Noon although some of the snow melted as it fell. After 12 Noon, the snow slacked up and turned to light to moderate sleet. At 1pm, I left work to go home. Hampstead was getting moderate sleet at 1PM. Only 1.8" snow had fallen at Hampstead by 1PM. As I headed north on Rt. 30 toward Manchester, the sleet changed over to moderate snow. Once I got home, I measured 3.8" snow at 1:30pm. By 2pm, I had 4.0" snow and the temperature was around 32 degrees. During the afternoon and early evening, bands of heavy snow and large flakes would come and then it would occasionally lighten up. The snow continued to accumulate. By 5 PM, I had 6.3" snow. At 7pm, I had 7.5" snow and by 8pm, I had 7.8" snow.

By this time, the snow had slacked up to just light snow flurries. The storm was now pretty much over. Water eq. from the snowfall, sleet and rain was 1.20" storm total. Despite warmer temperatures and clear skies the next day, I still had two to five inches snow cover left in the evening. On the 31st, I only had snow patches left in the evening. The 7.8 inches of snow during this month of October shattered the old record of 0.2" snow in October 2009 just two years ago. That is the only other measureable October snowfall I ever had in my 23 years of record keeping here at Manchester 1SW. Before the October 2009 snowfall, there had not been any measurable October snowfall in this area since October 10, 1979 when a record 3.5" snow fell at Finksburg 2NW at my parent's house. That record still holds because only 2.0" snow fell during this October's snowstorm. Plus this snowfall came much later in the month. Much of their snow melted as it fell in this last October snowstorm. The elevation at my parent's house is 660 ft. Because temperatures stayed above freezing at lower elevations and locations to the south and east, this last storm was not the biggest October snowstorm for those locations.

For some, the October 10, 1979 storm is still the record snowstorm. For others to the south and east, the snowstorm of October 30, 1925 is still the biggest snowstorm on record in modern times. A more widespread snowstorm occurred in the 1925 storm across the states of Maryland and Delaware. Temperatures were colder in that storm although snowfall amounts varied less.

Most areas received two to four inches snowfall from La Plata to Cambridge, Maryland to Dover, Delaware northward. No snow fell at Salisbury, two inches fell at La Plata and Cambridge, 2.2 inches at D.C., three inches at Dover, Delaware, up to 5 inches fell in central and northern Harford County and northern Baltimore County. In western Maryland, 5.7" fell at Frostburg, 7.7" fell at Oakland, and 12.4" fell at Grantsville, Maryland. These amounts are monthly totals and I'm not sure if Grantsville had any other snowfalls that month. I will have to look into that.

Another October snowstorm with slightly less snow hit Maryland and Delaware on October 19, 1940. In that storm, the two inch line is at D.C. to Annapolis to Kent Island to three inches at Dover, Delaware. However, Milford, Delaware only had a trace of snow. Salisbury again had no snow. Owings Ferry Landing in southern Maryland only had a half inch of snow. Up to four inches snow fell in northern Baltimore County. Only 2.0 to 3.5" fell in Harford County. Only up to about five inches snow fell in Garrett County. I am currently working on a more detailed report on October snowfalls for the Mid Atlantic and northeast United States going back to at least the 1700's. When completed, I hope to share with you my results.