

Spanning the Gap

Flood of January 1996: Photo Gallery

NPS Photos by Paul Kimsey and Tom Solon



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Editor's Perspective: The River Disposes

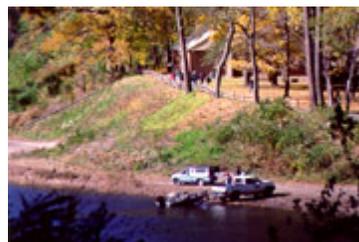
The park is no stranger to floods. The flooding from the hurricanes of August 1955 was so costly in lives and property that Congress finally put through a long-standing proposal to dam the Delaware River. The Tocks Island Dam project, though, was eventually cancelled and the Delaware to this day still remains free-flowing -- undammed -- along its main stem.

And flow it has. The mid-winter flood of January 1996, however, was not the result of hurricanes. What caused it? In simplest terms, a run of unfortunate weather.

Heavy snowfalls from the onset of winter 1995-1996 -- more than 60 inches total in Stroudsburg by New Year's -- had left deep snowpack in the woods. A cold snap froze the river to the depth of several feet. Then a few days of warm weather and constant rain swelled the river and its tributaries with runoff and melted snow. Streams surged and tore out footbridges to the last splinter. The river began to rise...

Ice jams held back the waters -- for a time -- so that the river flooded the lowlands. The river climbed the grassy slopes and into the bathhouses at Milford and Smithfield Beaches. It covered River Road at Hialeah, and breached Route 209 north of Bushkill. Swirling around the floodplain, the waters shoved some heavy objects *upstream*, and carried off others as far south as Portland, four miles downstream of the Water Gap.

Then the jams gave way. At Kittatinny Point, the river squeezed through at vehicular speed, bearing ice chunks the size of pick-up trucks. Standing on the terrace at Kittatinny Point Visitor center, trying to follow individual chunks of ice downstream with my eyes, I actually became dizzy. Though the Delaware narrows at the Water Gap, the river is still 200 yards wide at Kittatinny Pool, yet water climbed up the 22-step staircase at Kittatinny at more than an inch a minute. It flowed backward through the storm drains to drench the parking lots and lap at the hubcaps of my car. With four steps left above water, the surge subsided, and the visitor center, by then a



Kittatinny Beach in 2003 with rebuilt staircase at the far left. In the flood, the river surge climbed to within a few steps of the visitor center on top of the hill. The vehicles shown at the shoreline would have been under yards of water.



(Above) An eroded bank.

near-island outcrop, was spared.

When the worst was over, park employees ventured out with their cameras. Attention naturally focused on the developed areas along the Pennsylvania bank -- Smithfield, Dingmans, and Milford (Bushkill Access was not yet built) -- where heavy construction investment had been made, and now had been partly un-made. The long process of documenting damage, securing funds for repair, and rebuilding park facilities had begun.

Smithfield Beach

(NPS Photos by Paul Kimsey)

(Right) Smithfield Beach looking west from the beach to the bathhouse in 2002. In the flood, the river filled the bathhouse and its modern septic systems with feet of water.



(Left) Composite panorama of Smithfield Beach, looking east toward the river, on the morning of January 21, 1996. New Jersey on the other side of the river is in the background.



(Left, top and bottom) Looking north/northeast at the boat launch area from the bathhouse.

(Middle, top and bottom) Looking north at bathhouse from the area of the canoe launch.

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(Right, top and bottom) Looking south at the canoe launch restroom. Note the still-flooded area south of the restroom, the location of the canoe launch approach road.

Park Roadways

(NPS Photos by Tom Solon)

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(Right) Hialeah Air Park after a light snowfall in 2002. In the flood, the entire field became a lake.



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(Above, left) and *(right)* Looking south down PA Route 209 in the park, around Mileposts 7 and 8. The fields near Eshback Launch, on the east side of Route 209, are submerged.

(Right) River Road PA near Hialeah Air Park. The dumpster from the maintenance area at the north end of Smithfield Beach has washed *upstream* a half mile and is sitting near the submerged fields near the air park.

Dingmans Access

(NPS Photos by Tom Solon)

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(Right) Dingmans launch looking north toward the bridge in 1999. In the flood, the ramp went under water.





(Left) Dingmans Access, looking north toward the stone building at the bridge.

(Right) The approach road to the boat/canoe launch at Dingmans Ferry, looking northeast toward the bridge. The launch area is down the slope, under the river. Dingmans Access, looking north toward the stone building at the bridge.



The bridge over the Delaware River at Dingmans Ferry, looking east toward the New Jersey bank.

Milford Beach

(NPS Photos by Tom Solon)

(Right) Milford Beach looking south at the bridge (far left in the distance) in 1995. In the flood, the lots were covered with ice and debris left by the river.





(Top row) Looking north at Milford Beach toward the Robert Blood House (seen in the distance) and the bathhouse area. The beach parking lots are covered with river deposit.

(Middle row) Looking south at Milford Beach, toward the Milford-Montague bridge (in the distance).

(Bottom row) The launch areas at Milford Beach.