

**History of Valley Floods
Long, Deep, Destructive**

(Newspaper Article Listing Floods in
Maricopa County from 1874 to 1972) (Historic)
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History Of Valley Floods Long, Deep, Destructive

Once 800 homes in the Phoenix area were damaged or destroyed by flood waters.

Another time, the Salt River below Granite Reef Dam was eight miles wide.

THEN THERE was the day when people climbed onto roofs and into trees to escape flood waters.

Flooding in Phoenix isn't new. This chronology of Phoenix floods during the past 104 years tells the story:

JANUARY 1874 — Damage caused by flooding was "considerable." Only the most strenuous efforts saved the flour mill of Hellings & Co., at about what now is 40th Street and Roosevelt. An assessment of \$100 per share was required to repair Swilling's Irrigation Ditch. The flood came within 200 yards of Goldwater's store and was nearly three miles wide at one point.

DEC. 29, 1879— An unusually heavy rain caused the Salt River to rise 10 feet in two days.

DEC. 23, 1883—A dam and canal headgates were ripped out by raging water as heavy rains caused a rise of 14 feet in the Salt River.

FEB. 22, 1890—The Salt River rose 17

feet, washing out the Tempe bridge and miles of track between Phoenix, Maricopa and Yuma. Adobe houses were washed away.

FEBRUARY 1891 — Heavy rain began in the Phoenix area on the 16th. After three days it tapered off, but started again and continued to the 23rd. The river rose one foot higher than the 1890 flood. The Tempe railroad bridge was washed out on the 18th along with telephone and telegraph wires. At some places below the confluence with the Verde, the Salt was eight miles wide. Below Phoenix, it was two to three miles wide. People climbed up onto roofs and into trees to escape the rushing waters.

Sept. 11, 1897 — An excessive fall (1.89 inches in 55 minutes) was recorded in Phoenix.

February 1919 — A stage of 12.5 feet was attained by the river at Phoenix on the 28th.

Aug. 21, 1921 — Water overflowed the usually dry Cave Creek and spread as far south as the Capitol, flooding the building's basement and covering the first floor. (Cave Creek Dam was constructed within the next two years.)

Sept. 30, 1926 — The crossing at Gillespie Dam was closed, with water four feet deep on the crest of the dam. (The closing was for three days).

July 1936 — Phoenix, Mesa and other Valley towns had water standing in the streets, sewers being unable to take care of a heavy rain. Irrigation canals broke their banks and flooded several hundred acres of farmland. Crops were ruined and cattle were killed.

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● HISTORY

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February 1937 — Two small bridges, a storage shed and several trucks were washed away at the Bartlett Dam site on the Verde River. A gas line in the Salt River bed near Phoenix was undermined by water and broken.

Oct. 23, 1956 — Flood waters from Cave Creek poured into a gravel pit and buried a rock crushing plant under 30 feet of water. School children were stranded at Sierra Vista School, 10 miles north of Glendale, but were rescued by nightfall.

Aug. 5, 1959 — Heavy rains caused damage by flooding near the Arizona Canal. Damage was to homes and furnishings.

July 1961 — Damage of \$300,000 in Phoenix and \$25,000 in Glendale was reported after heavy rains wrecked homes, businesses and utilities. Cars were washed down flooded arroyos.

Aug. 16-17, 1963 — A thunderstorm moved into the Valley and intensified over Glendale. The Grand Canal overflowed its banks, flooding homes and businesses. The Red Cross set up an emergency unit to help families driven from their homes.

Dec. 30-31, 1965 — A warm rain melted much of the snow on the Verde and Salt watersheds, making necessary the release of about 70,000 cubic feet of water per second into the Salt below Granite Reef. The result was the worst flood in the Valley since the completion of the reservoir system. All roads crossing the river in Mesa, Tempe, Scottsdale and Phoenix were washed out, and all bridges were at least partially damaged, creating the worst traffic jam in the state's history.

June 22, 1972 — About 6 a.m., a severe thunderstorm developed southwest of Phoenix and moved northeastward across northeast Phoenix and Paradise Valley. In some areas more than four inches of rain fell within two hours. Severe flooding occurred in several washes, including Indian Bend. More than 800 homes were damaged or destroyed. Irrigation canals were breached.

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