

The Great Arkansas Flood of 1927 by J. Michael Howard, Geology Supervisor

Arkansas has the distinction of being affected by the greatest flood recorded in North America which took place during May of 1927. This flood is listed in Table 2 of USGS Circular 1254 as the 4th largest flood in recorded world history.

This flood affected not only Arkansas, but also Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Thirty six counties in Arkansas were affected and 13 percent of the entire land area. The flood was caused by a number of factors, including heavy rains in the central basin of the Mississippi River during the summer of 1926 and early snow melts in Canada during this same time, heavy rains in central Arkansas which caused the Arkansas River to be in flood stage in 1927, and bursting of earthen levees both along the Mississippi River and the Arkansas River.

The waters finally had receded by August of 1927, leaving a death toll estimated by some as high as 127 in Arkansas. Thousands of families were homeless and agriculture and industry in the state suffered major losses in the millions of dollars.

People living along the Mississippi River have seen many spring floods – like those of 1903, 1912, 1913, 1922 – but authorities agree that the 1927 flood was the worst in recorded history. From May to August of 1927, despite the best efforts of man, the river reclaimed its alluvial flood plain.



Arkansas City, 1927 flood



Flood victims, 1927 flood



Near Marked Tree, 1927 flood



Note people and cattle along railroad track, 1927 flood

References:

O'Conner, J. E. and Costa, J. E., 2004, *The World's Largest Floods, past and present – Their causes and magnitudes*: US Geological Survey Circular 1254, 13 p.

Internet articles from the *Old Statehouse Museum, Arkansas Encyclopedia*, and *Arkansas Group Travel*, 2005

Photographs courtesy of US Army Corps of Engineers website