

# Hurricane Hugo's March from the Sea



## Background

Hurricane Hugo started early in September 1989 as a cluster of thunderstorms moving off the coast of Africa. It then developed into a tropical depression off the Cape Verde Islands the next day and began to move across the Atlantic Ocean. It became a tropical storm on September 11 and a hurricane on the 13<sup>th</sup>. It struck Guadeloupe on the 17<sup>th</sup> and Puerto Rico the next day. He then turned to the northwest and strengthened. Hugo made landfall northeast of Charleston, South Carolina near midnight on September 21, 1989 and became one of the costliest and most intense hurricanes ever to hit the United States. Effects were felt in Charlotte, North Carolina where it hammered that inland city with winds over 90 mph.



The Ben Sawyer Bridge to Sullivan's Island, SC sags into the water. NOAA.



Charlotte Observer, September 1989.



Colorized IR satellite image of Hugo at landfall. NOAA.

Not only was Hugo intense, it was also fast. It was trapped between two existing weather systems, a low pressure system lingering over the Gulf of Mexico, and a high pressure system hovering off the Virginia Capes. These two systems were rotating in opposite directions so that when Hugo passed through, it was squeezed between them and shot forward at 25 mph. This forward speed added to the intensity of winds and height of the storm surge of water as Hugo slammed ashore.



*"I will never do this again! When they say evacuate, you should evacuate."* Melissa Myers, Folly Beach resident.



Hugo moved both houses/boats from their foundations/mooring.

## Impact

- ❖ Total Cost: \$17.4 Billion
- ❖ Storm Type: Category 4
- ❖ Landfall: North of Charleston S.C.
- ❖ Deaths: 82
- ❖ Over 26,000 Homes Damaged/Destroyed
- ❖ Maximum Sustained Winds: 138 mph
- ❖ Storm Surge: 20 feet
- ❖ South Carolina Rainfall: 10 inches
- ❖ Half billion dollars in timber damage



Atlantic House at Folly Beach, before and after.

*"The tree in front crashed through the house."* Melissa Myers, Folly Beach resident.

