

Tornado—Barrie, Ontario (1985)



The Barrie tornado completely destroyed a housing subdivision. Over \$100 million worth of damage to buildings, roads and crops occurred.

They called May 31, 1985, “Black Friday.” Across Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and southern Ontario, dozens of tornadoes, many of them violent, touched the ground and wreaked havoc on the landscape. Thirteen tornadoes touched southern Ontario ground late that afternoon and one of them hit the town of Barrie directly. Other tornadoes touched down near Warton, Clinton, Walkerton, Hopeville, Alliston, Arthur, Orangeville, Tottenham, Mansfield, Lindsay, Madoc and several other towns.

Two of these tornadoes rated F4 on the Fujita Scale, which rates intensity on a scale of 0–5, 5 being the greatest intensity. The tornado that hit Barrie formed in Hopeville and travelled 80 kilometres to Barrie, leaving a path of destruction in its wake. It reached the outer limits of Barrie at about 4:30 p.m. Its path was as much as 600 metres wide and it sped through Barrie for five kilometres, finally dissipating over Lake Simcoe.

The Barrie tornado completely demolished a city block, destroyed a subdivision, and flattened 16 factories as well as numerous houses, warehouses, the racetrack, trees and highways. Cars were tossed, and so were horses. The total damage in Ontario was immense: 12 lives were lost, 280 people were injured, 800 people were left homeless, and \$100 million worth of damage to buildings, roads and crops occurred.

Particularly mild spring temperatures—in the upper twenties in southern Ontario—and a very low pressure front moving northward from the midwestern United States caused the conditions that led to the formation of a super storm with severe thunderstorms and high winds over the Great Lakes. A cold front behind the low pressure cell resulted in the second of two bouts of thunderstorms in Ontario that day, and was the deadly trigger that primed the conditions for tornado formation.

There are about 80 tornadoes every year in Canada. The Barrie tornado was the fourth most destructive in Canadian history.

Additional reading

Bruineman, Marg. ““Oh my God...that’s a tornado.”” *The Barrie Examiner*, May 27, 2010. <http://www.thebarrieexaminer.com/2010/05/27/oh-my-god-thats-a-tornado>.

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. “1985 Barrie tornado.” CBC Digital Archives. <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/1985-barrie-tornado>.

Suen, Fan-Yee. “‘The sky was green’: Barrie looks back on fatal tornado 30 years later.” *CTV News*, May 22, 2015. <http://toronto.ctvnews.ca/the-sky-was-green-barrie-looks-back-on-fatal-tornado-30-years-later-1.2387150>.