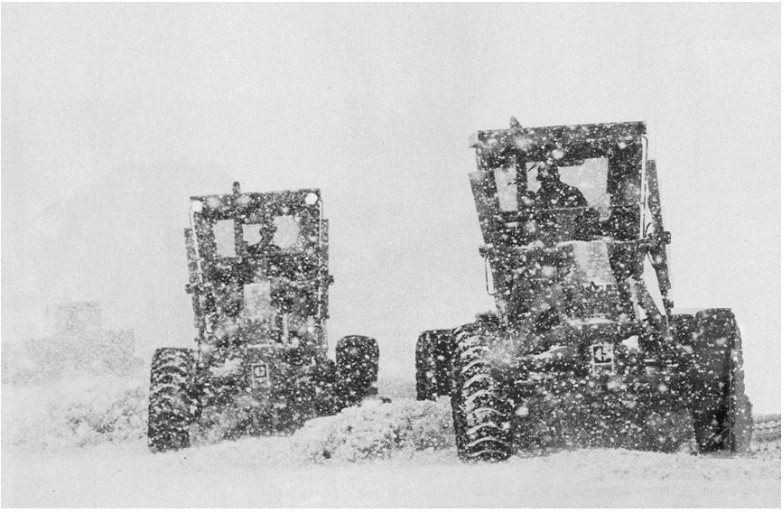
Remembering the January 11-13, 1985 snowstorm over South Central Texas

The January 11-13, 1985 snow event caused 1 to 14 inches of snow over the area. The northern Hill Country had amounts varying from 2 to 10 inches, while over the southern Hill Country 10 to 14 inch snow amounts were common. Over South Central Texas, 7 to 14 inch amounts fell, with 10 to 14 inches laying down a nice blanket of snow near the Balcones Escarpment. Near Austin, amounts varied from 1 inch north of Austin and 7 to 10 inches west and southwest of the city. The official measurement for Austin was 3.6 inches. In San Antonio total snowfall came in at 13.5 inches, while Del Rio received 8.6 inches. This event significantly broke all previous snowfall records.

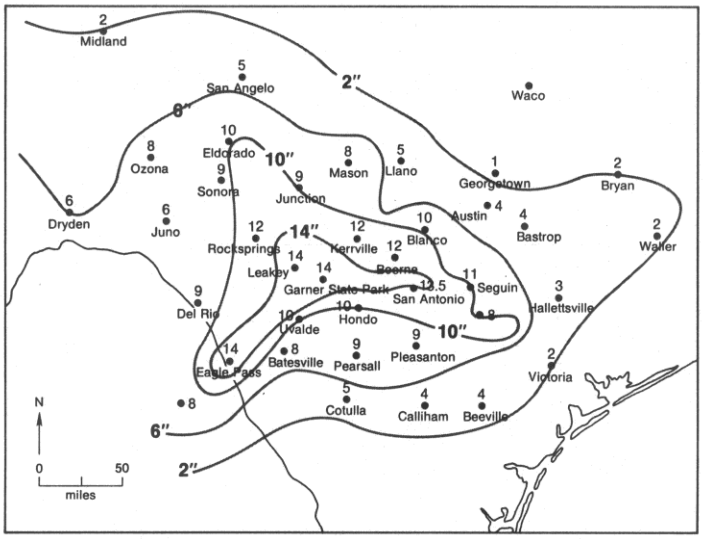
January 11 to 13 Snow Event

This snow event began Friday evening January 11, 1985 near Del Rio between 730 and 900 pm, then spread east to affect San Antonio around 1135 pm. Snow ended in San Antonio during the early morning hours of Sunday January 13. All snowfall records dating back to 1885 were easily broken. Total snowfall in this event was 13.5 inches for San Antonio. This snow event exceeded the previous 24 hour record of 5 inches January 23-24, 1926 and event record of 6.4 inches January 23-24, 1926. The greatest amount of snow on the ground was 10 inches at midnight January 13, shattering the previous record of 6 inches January 24, 1926.

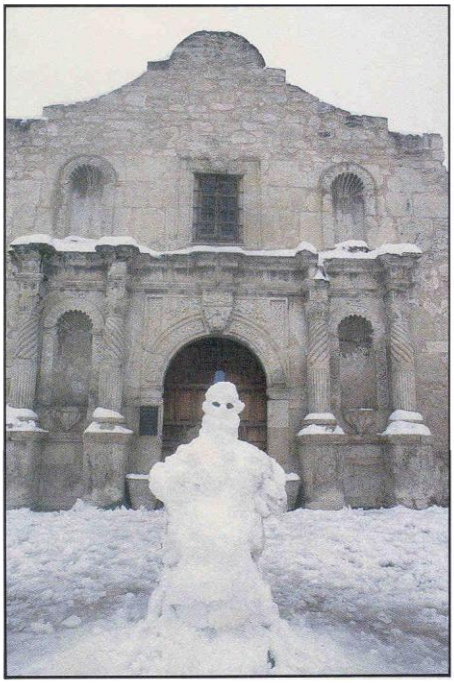
The first surge of cold air moved through the area January 10, followed by another surge of arctic air on the 11th. This surge dropped temperatures below freezing over the area. An area of low pressure moved in from the Southwest U.S. and northern Mexico, accompanied by a good tap of moisture at upper levels coming from the tropics to the south and southwest. A series of disturbances ahead of the main low over northern Mexico swept across the area causing lift for the precipitation event. As the upper low over northern Mexico moved east, skies cleared Monday, January 14. The heavy snowfall event over South Central Texas on January 11 to 13 was a record with up to 14 inches of snow. The all time record heavy snow event for the southern part of the state occurred February 13 and 14, 1895, when 20 to 24 inches fell around Houston.



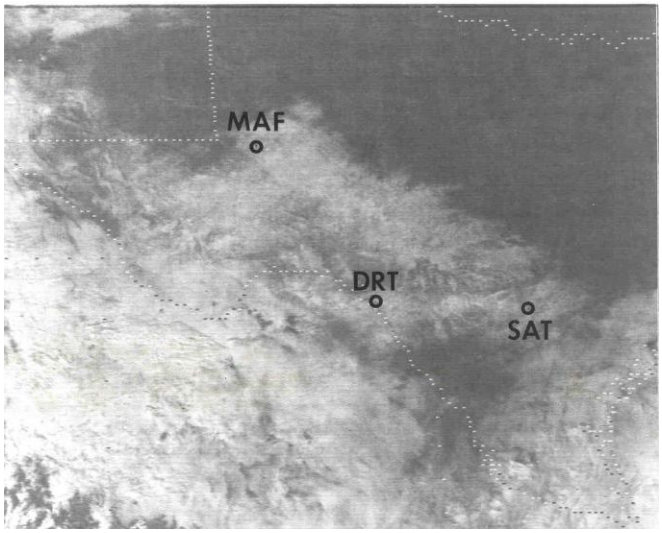
History-making plows - graders clear San Antonio International Airport's runways for the first time ever. (photo by Al Ransom)



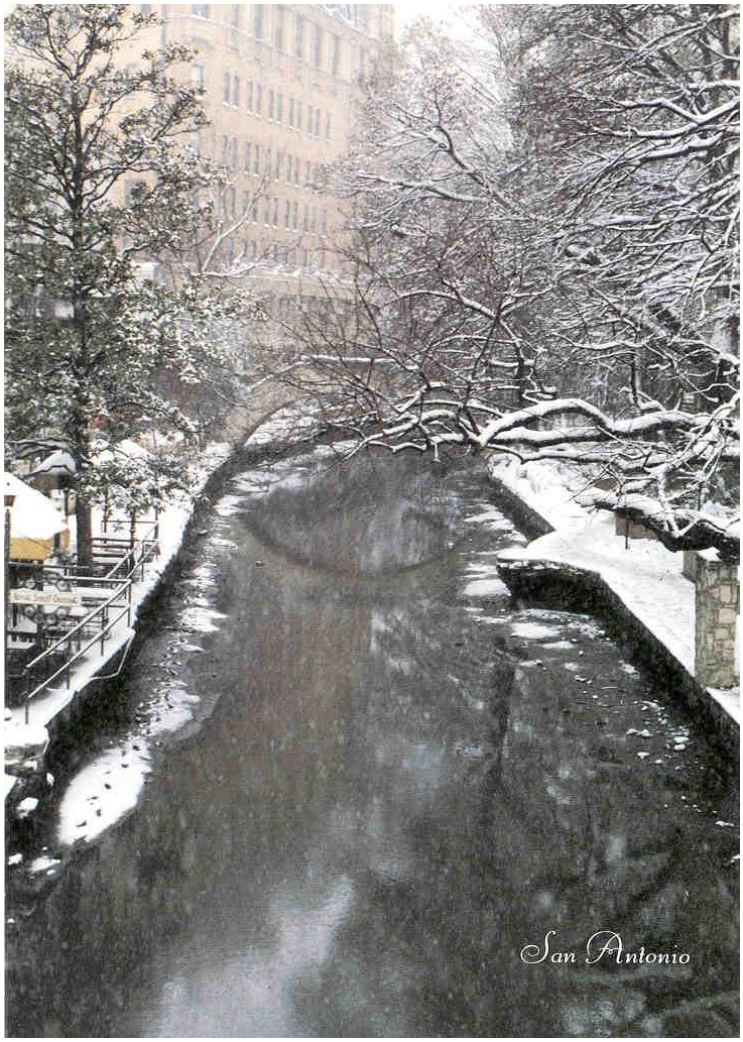
Snowfall amounts across South Central Texas



The Alamo in San Antonio



Snowfall on visible satellite imagery



The San Antonio Riverwalk

Breckenridge Park in San Antonio