
A ten year radar climatology of rainfall over Portland, Maine.

SCOTT COLLIS*

Environmental Science Division, Argonne National Laboratory

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a Department of Homeland Security, Regional Resiliency Assessment Program study into precipitation over Portland, Maine carried out by Argonne National Laboratory. The primary data source is scanning weather radar which collects information about precipitating particles over a large (250km plus) domain. The Python ARM radar Toolkit was used to retrieve rainfall rates from the local radar (in the Gray township outside of Portland) and map them onto a 250m resolution grid over a 100km domain. Using Argonne's large scale cluster, Blues, the problem was mapped to 10 years worth of data, just over 600,000 ten minute volumes or just over 10TB of data. Each time step was reduced to two numbers: The domain mean and maximum rainfall rate to allow easy indexing of the data set. In addition the diurnal (daily) cycle of precipitation was studied as was the seasonal cycle.

1. Introduction

Quoting directly from the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) webpage : *The Regional Resiliency Assessment Program (RRAP) is a cooperative assessment of specific critical infrastructure within a designated geographic area and a regional analysis of the surrounding infrastructure. The RRAP is led by the Department of Homeland Security and addresses a range of hazards that could have regionally and nationally significant consequences. Each year, the Department selects these voluntary and non-regulatory RRAP projects with input and guidance from federal and state partners.* Argonne is a partner in the RRAP project over Portland, Maine. One specific aspect we are looking at in critical drainage infrastructure and what will be required in a changing climate scenario. Dynamical downscaling (eg Wang and Kotamarthi (2015)) where a high resolution computer model is used to simulate what happens within the 100km climate model grid cell, is coming into more common usage. However, the key science question being asked by Argonne researchers is: Is the 12km resolution of these models enough to resolve high intensity localized precipitation events?

To this end our team carried out a study that involves using NOAA weather radars, known as Weather Surveillance Radars -1988 Doppler or WSR-88D (Crum and Alberty (1993)) to create high resolution rain maps for ingest into hydrological models. These rain maps are then

de-resolved or made coarser and the impact on stream and culvert flow analyzed over the Portland area. This report only deals with the generation of the rain maps and is broken into four sections: This introduction, Background information on the tools used and an introduction to radar meteorology, a discussion of the results obtained and some thoughts as to future work.

2. Background

Data from the WSR-88D radars are freely available both realtime, archived by the National Centers for Environmental Information and also, recently in the Amazon Cloud. In order to help the reader understand the processing that was performed on the radar data to extract geophysical insight we will first give some basic background in radar meteorology.

a. NOAA weather radars

The National Weather Service operates a network of 160 radars for the monitoring of atmospheric phenomena. These transmit pluses of radiation and monitor the reflections, or backscatter, of objects in the pulse's path. The radar receives these reflected signals and calculates profiles of data along the path of propagation of the pulse. If the radar stayed still users will receive just one "soda straw" view through the target of study (eg a rainstorm) so, in order to map a volume of space the radar is scanned in azimuth (from north) and elevation (from the horizon). This is illustrated in part in fig 1.

A single sweep through 360 degrees of azimuth is carried out before the elevation angle is changed. This is

*Corresponding author address: Scott Collis, Argonne National Laboratory, Environmental Science division, 9700 South Cass Ave, Argonne, IL 60514
E-mail: scollis@anl.gov

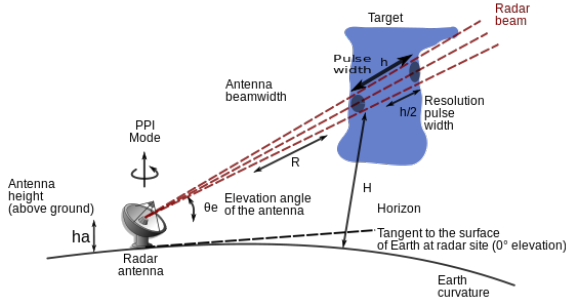


FIG. 1: Cartoon of the propagation of the radar beam through a storm, By Vigneron et Pierre cb - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, Link to Wikimedia

called a Plan Position Indicator scan or PPI (a historical hangover from when radar images were viewed on cathode ray tube displays). One primary measurement radars collect is how effectively the media (eg raindrops) reflects radiation back and is called Reflectivity Factor often denoted Z_e . We will skip the derivation and description of this quantity, interested readers are directed to Doviak and Zrnić (1984) for more information. An example of a PPI of reflectivity factor is shown in fig 2a.

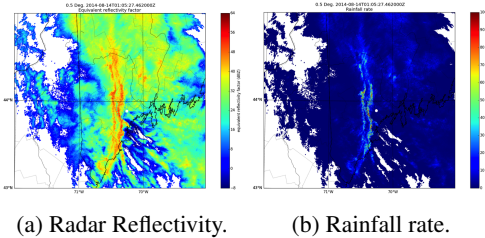


FIG. 2: Data in the radars native coordinate system of azimuth and range from the lowest elevation sweep of 0.5° .

If we assume that the volume of the radar pulse contains a number of rain droplets of varying diameter (D) and can be described as obeying a number distribution $N(D)$ (so for a particular Diameter you get a density of rain drops in m^{-3} of N). The reflectivity of raindrops ends up being:

$$Z_e = \int N(D) D^6 dD$$

or the 6th moment of the drop size distribution. This means a small number of larger drops has a bigger impact than increasing the density of smaller drops.

There have been many papers written on the best way to derive rainfall rates from reflectivity factor and other radar variables. For the purposes of this study where we are more interested in the comparative nature of rainfall

patterns we stuck to a simple parametric fit as presented in Gu et al. (2011) of

$$Z_e = 300R^{1.4}. \quad (1)$$

Equation is inverted to give rainfall rate and an example of this is shown in fig 2b.

b. Application Chain

The Python-ARM Radar Toolkit (Py-ART, Heistermann et al. (2014)) is the main tool used to perform the steps of: Reading, retrieving rainfall rate, gridding to a cartesian grid and writing to a Community standard file format. Py-ART is a community data-model drive architecture for interactive development of custom processing chains implemented in the Python programming language and makes heavy use of the Scientific Python ecosystem (Jones et al. (2001–)). Py-ART is community based open source software welcoming public contributions on GitHub.

Py-ART has a native reader for multiple WSR-88D file formats. The data is read into the Py-ART common data model. Rainfall rate in native (antenna) coordinates of range from the radar, azimuth from north and elevation above the horizon is calculated. Then, in order to facilitate easy analysis, the rainfall (in addition to other values) is mapped to a regular Cartesian grid with coordinates of meridional and zonal (east/west, north/south) displacement from the radar location. Mapping is achieved using an inverse distance weighted objective analysis system. Each grid point in the destination grid is assigned a radius of influence. Radar gates falling within that radius are averaged to that point using an exponential inverse distance weighting (after Barnes (1964)). Py-ART calculates the optimal variable radius of influence.

Since the radar samples azimuthally the resolution, R , of the data varies as a function of distance given by

$$R = 2d \tan\left(\frac{1}{2}\theta_{fwhm}\right) \quad (2)$$

where θ_{fwhm} is the radar beam width and d is the distance of the range gate from the radar. The WSR-88D radars have a beam width of 1 degree so at a distance of 30km the resolution will be approximately 500m. Given we wish to oversample near the city of Portland which is approximately 20km from the radar we chose a grid spacing of 200m resulting in a grid with 501 by 501 elements and a domain of 100km.

Figure 3 shows a mapping of rainfall rates calculated in fig 2b. This data is then saved to a NetCDF file that complies with the Climate Forecasting conventions (see <http://cfconventions.org/>).

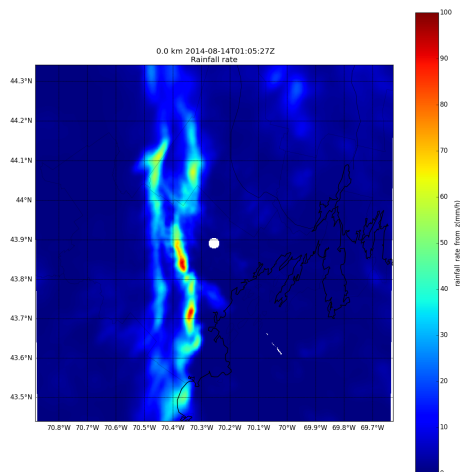


FIG. 3: Rainfall rates as shown in fig 2b mapped to a Cartesian grid around the Portland, Maine area.

c. Data Informatics

Section b gave an overview of the application chain for one volume. Given that our data set consists of hundreds of thousands of files we need an effective way to reduce the problem and map to a large scale cluster. Fortunately, due to the granularity (one granule = one file = one volume) the problem is *pleasantly* parallel. Also fortunately the Scientific Python ecosystem has recently been enhanced by project Jupyter (Pérez and Granger (2007)) which includes methods for simply mapping a serialized problem to a list of parameters (eg a file list) as shown in fig 4.

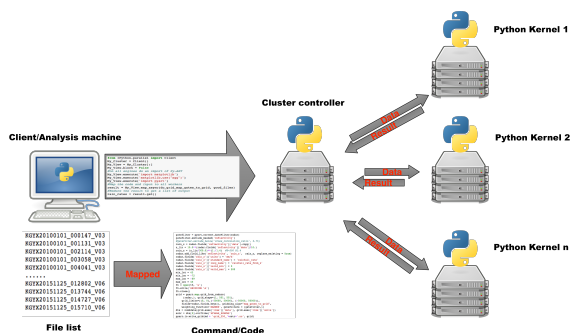


FIG. 4: pictorial representation of a Jupyter cluster being used for Map-Reduce.

Files containing data from the Portland WSR-88D (Code: KGYX) were staged to Argonne’s Blues clus-

ter with 310 compute nodes, 64 GB of memory on each node, 16 cores per compute node (Intel Sandy Bridge) 4,960 compute cores available and a theoretical peak performance of 107.8 TFlops. Mapping the 670,353 files that made up the study was performed using several jobs ranging from 64 to 1024 cores taking a wall time of just over 48 hours. Each job produced three output files: a NetCDF file containing the gridded data, plots such as those shown in fig 3 and a simple ascii file with the mean of the rainfall values in the domain and the maximum value in the domain.

3. Results

Once execution was complete the rainfall grids were archived and the domain mean values were moved off the cluster for analysis (the advantage of reducing several Tb down to 100Mb). Figure 5 shows the domain mean rainfall rate (for the domain shown in fig 2b) as a function of time. Since the temporal resolution is of the order of 10 minutes the figure does not have the resolution to show individual events.

a. Rainfall look up table

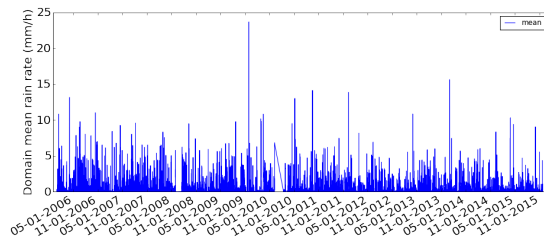


FIG. 5: Domain mean rainfall rate as derived from a reflectivity/rainfall relationship using the KGYX WSR-88D radar.

For the purposes of RRAP and understanding rainfall over Portland the rainfall rates can act as a look up table to identify rainfall events for further study. While domain mean rainfall rate is a crude metric all the grid are archived allowing quick reanalysis. Due to noise in the radar signal and scattering off objects like buildings (called clutter) the minimum signal is 0.05 mm/hr so anything less than this is considered “no rain”.

b. Brief Analysis of Rainfall Variability

We can look at the temporal distribution of rainfall by partitioning it into hourly and monthly percentiles and means. Rainfall rates are spilt into separate distributions based on the hour of the day (local time) and the month of the year. Based on these distributions the 25th, median and 75th percentiles of rainfall rate are calculated. These

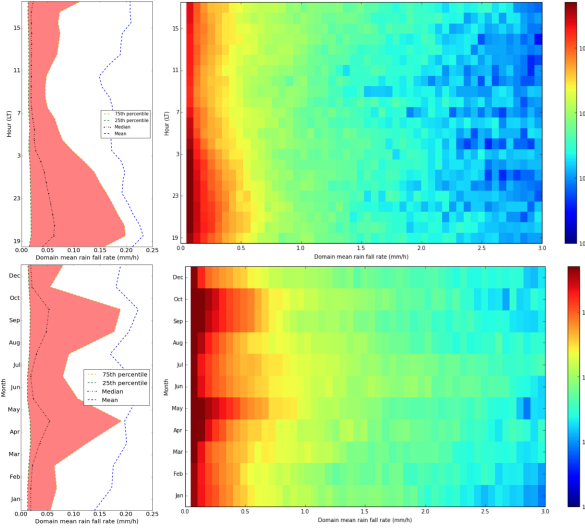


FIG. 6: Rainfall statistics broken down into hourly and monthly distributions. The left hand side shows percentiles of rainfall events and the mean. The right hand side shows, for each hour or month, a histogram of rainfall events using a colormap. Red colors show high counts blue shows rare events.

are shown in the lefthand panels of fig 6. In addition, histograms of the rainfall rate for each hour and month are calculated and is shown in the right hand panels. These histograms are stacked in time, so all the rainfall rates for a month (say, March) are grouped and then the rates are sorted into bins. The first bin is 0.1 to 0.2 mm/h so there will be a certain number of times we observe that rain rate, in the month of March, in our study, it was 1000 samples giving it the red color in fig 6. A sample is a single radar measurement which occurs approximately every 10 minutes. Very high rainfall values happen less frequently. For example, domain mean rainfall rates of 2.9 to 3.0 mm/h in the month of March only occurs 10 times (note the color scale in fig 6 is logarithmic). Individual histograms for 10-11pm and for the month of October are shown in fig 7. Figure 6 highlights many interesting patterns in Portland rainfall. First, given the mean is much greater than the median we can see that the rainfall distribution is skewed. That is, a greater contribution towards total rainfall comes from the more extreme events than the weaker events. The figure also shows a clear diurnal (or daily) cycle with an overnight maximum. This is consistent with many studies of rainfall across the globe (eg Nesbitt and Zipser (2003)). This is due to the most widespread systems being more intense at night, the physical mechanisms are beyond the scope of this report but it is pleasing to see an expected natural and physically consistent variation apparent in the data. The monthly data shows a clear seasonal cycle with

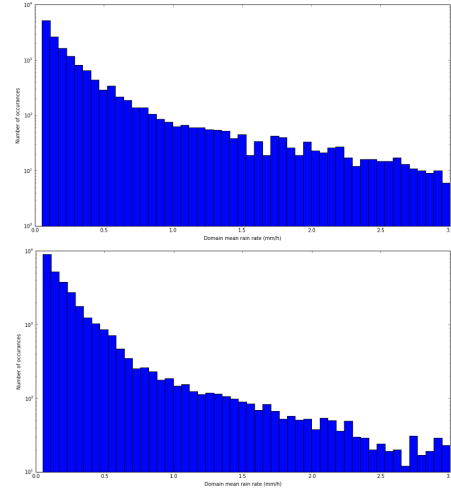


FIG. 7: Histograms of domain mean rainfall rates for 10pm to 11pm at night (top) and the month of October (bottom).

the percentiles exhibiting a fall and spring peak. However inspection of the mean and histograms to the right shows that while mid-scale events are more populous in spring and fall higher end events occur in summer as well.

So far the scope of our work has been limited to investigating bulk statistics. In order to look at trends and to comment on if heavy precipitation events are increasing would entail more rigorous data quality work to ensure technical issues do not lead to erroneous findings.

4. Conclusions and Future Work

Ten years of radar data from Portland, Maine, were used to construct a decade's worth of rainfall rate grids. These grids have been handed over to the hydrology group at Argonne and will be used to investigate the scale dependence of rainfall. For each grid the domain mean rainfall was calculated both as a health and status monitor and as a look up table to quickly find events of interest to the team. This data turned out to be interesting in its own right. The rainfall record shows interesting daily and monthly cycles with an overnight maximum and spring and fall peaks. The rainfall record is also highly skewed with the median rainfall rate being much less than the mean. This indicates that Maine gets much of its rainfall from heavier events.

This rainfall retrieval technique outlined in sec 2 was crude as the initial aim of the study was purely to create grids for use in the hydrological modeling. In the future we wish to improve the quality control of the data to filter out various phenomena that corrupt the data and to also detect the presence of snow and treat it differently to rain. The retrieval and cluster framework is already set up (see

this link to the GitHub repository) so improvements can be made and rerunning the climatology is only a matter of core hours.

There are two main areas for future work beyond quality control improvements: Comparison with regional downscaling hindcasts and the development of more sophisticated metrics than just domain mean.

Signatures apparent in fig 6 should also be present in rainfall produced by regionally downscaled climate models. We are already working with scientists here at Argonne comparing our radar measurements to that produced by forcing high resolution models with the CMIP5 climate models. The period of overlap is from 1995 to 2005. NEXRAD is only reliable after 1995 (getting considerably better in 2001 in terms of uptime) and CMIP5 only goes to 2005. We are performing this study both over Portland and Oklahoma where the DoE Atmospheric Radiation Measurement Research program has extensive instrumentation Ackerman and Stokes (2003). These studies become more important as the climate modeling community gears up for CMIP6, where we will have a much greater overlap between the hindcast and radar data. Radar climatologies like those presented in this report will be key for testing the veracity of various downscaling methodologies.

As previously mentioned we limited our investigations to looking at bulk means and monthly and daily cycles of precipitation. More detailed investigations into the quality of the data and the application of very careful statistical analysis may allow trends to be investigated, including comparisons with the National Climate Assessment (Globalchange.gov (2014)), specifically with figure 2.18.

As mentioned previously in this report domain mean rainfall is a simple but not sufficient way to index the contents of the rainfall grids. We wish to extend this study to identify "fingerprints of severity" in the rainfall grids. An example would be the area of the grid over a certain rainfall rate threshold. We then wish to collect information from atmospheric reanalyses (such as atmospheric instability indexes) to do an ingredients based study into what causes extreme rainfall in Maine. We can then look at climate models and see if these ingredients will be more or less likely in future climate scenarios thus enabling us to make data driven comments on the likelihood of extreme rainfall in the Portland area going forward.

Acknowledgments. This report has been created by UChicago Argonne, LLC, Operator of Argonne National Laboratory ("Argonne"). Argonne, a U.S. Department of Energy Office of Science laboratory, is operated under Contract No. DE-AC02-06CH11357. This research was supported by the Office of Biological and Environmental Research of the U.S. Department of Energy as part

of the Atmospheric Radiation Measurement Climate Research Facility and the Department of Homeland Security Regional Resiliency Assessment Program. We gratefully acknowledge the computing resources provided on Blues, a high-performance computing cluster operated by the Laboratory Computing Resource Center at Argonne National Laboratory.

We wish to thank Duane Verner, Thomas Wall and Eugene Yan for useful discussions during this work and Jonathan Helmus for his tireless support of Py-ART. We also wish to thank all the contributors to Py-ART and the Scientific Python Ecosystem.

References

- Ackerman, T. P., and G. M. Stokes, 2003: The Atmospheric Radiation Measurement Program. *Physics Today*, **56** (1), 38–44, doi:10.1063/1.1554135, URL <http://link.aip.org/link/?PTO/56/38/1>.
- Barnes, S. L., 1964: A Technique for Maximizing Details in Numerical Weather Map Analysis. *Journal of Applied Meteorology*, **3** (4), 396–409, doi:10.1175/1520-0450(1964)003<0396:ATFMDI>2.0.CO;2, URL <http://journals.ametsoc.org/doi/abs/10.1175/1520-0450%281964%29003%3C0396%3AATFMDI%3E2.0.CO%3B2?prevSearch=A+technique+for+maximizing+details+in+numerical+weather+map+analysis&searchHistoryKey=>.
- Crum, T. D., and R. L. Alberty, 1993: The WSR-88d and the WSR-88d Operational Support Facility. *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society*, **74** (9), 1669–1687, doi:10.1175/1520-0477(1993)074<1669:TWATWO>2.0.CO;2, URL <http://journals.ametsoc.org/doi/abs/10.1175/1520-0477%281993%29074%3C1669%3ATWATWO%3E2.0.CO%3B2?prevSearch=The+WSR-88D+and+the+WSR-88D+Operational+Support+Facility&searchHistoryKey=>.
- Doviak, R., and D. Zrnić, 1984: *Doppler radar and weather observations*. Academic Press, URL <https://books.google.com/books?id=BzxRAAAAMAAJ>.
- Globalchange.gov, 2014: National climate assessment. Accessed: 2016-05-31, <http://nca2014.globalchange.gov/report/our-changing-climate/heavy-downpours-increasing#graphic-16693>.
- Gu, J.-Y., A. Ryzhkov, P. Zhang, P. Neilley, M. Knight, B. Wolf, and D.-I. Lee, 2011: Polarimetric Attenuation Correction in Heavy Rain at C Band. *J. Appl. Meteor. Climatol.*, **50** (1), 39–58, doi:10.1175/2010JAMC2258.1, URL <http://journals.ametsoc.org/doi/abs/10.1175/2010JAMC2258.1>.
- Heistermann, M., and Coauthors, 2014: The Emergence of Open Source Software for the Weather Radar Community. *Bull. Amer. Meteor. Soc.*, doi:10.1175/BAMS-D-13-00240.1, URL <http://journals.ametsoc.org/doi/abs/10.1175/BAMS-D-13-00240.1>.
- Jones, E., T. Oliphant, P. Peterson, and Coauthors, 2001–: SciPy: Open source scientific tools for Python. URL <http://www.scipy.org/>, [Online; accessed 2016-03-02].
- Nesbitt, S. W., and E. J. Zipser, 2003: The Diurnal Cycle of Rainfall and Convective Intensity according to Three Years of TRMM Measurements. *Journal of Climate*, **16** (10), 1456–1475, doi:10.1175/1520-0442(2003)016<1456:TDCORA>2.0.CO;2, URL [http://journals.ametsoc.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1175/1520-0442\(2003\)016%3C1456%3ATDCORA%3E2.0.CO%3B2](http://journals.ametsoc.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1175/1520-0442(2003)016%3C1456%3ATDCORA%3E2.0.CO%3B2).

- Pérez, F., and B. E. Granger, 2007: IPython: a system for interactive scientific computing. *Computing in Science and Engineering*, **9** (3), 21–29, doi:10.1109/MCSE.2007.53, URL <http://ipython.org>.
- Wang, J., and V. R. Kotamarthi, 2015: High-resolution dynamically downscaled projections of precipitation in the mid and late 21st century over north america. *Earth's Future*, **3** (7), 268–288, doi:10.1002/2015EF000304, URL <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/2015EF000304>, 2015EF000304.