



A Lava Lamp Look at the Atlantic Ocean

Stretching from tropical Florida to the doorstep of Europe, the Gulf Stream carries a lot of heat, salt, and history. This river of water is an important part of the global ocean conveyor belt, moving water and heat from the Equator toward the far North Atlantic. It is one of the strongest currents on Earth and one of the most studied. Its discovery is often attributed to Benjamin Franklin, though sailors likely knew about the current long before they had a name for it.

This image shows a small portion of the Gulf Stream off of South Carolina as it appeared in infrared data collected by the Landsat 8 satellite in April 2013. Colors represent the energy—heat—being emitted by the water, with cooler temperatures in purple and the warmest water being nearly white. Note how the Gulf Stream is not a uniform band but instead has finer streams and pockets of warmer and colder water.