



CHOOSING A DIGITAL MAPPING PLATFORM FOR YOUR PROJECT

A workshop in the “Digital Humanist’s Help Desk” series

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Follow along with links at: **<https://bit.ly/4gdD4ss>**

OVERVIEW

With many options to choose from, picking the right tool for mapping your research in the humanities can be daunting. This session will guide participants through the pros and cons of various free and paid mapping tools and platforms like Google MyMaps, ZeeMaps, Felt, MapBox Studio, Leaflet, and ArcGIS Online. Special attention will be paid to evaluating your own source material, needs, and priorities to find the best tool for you and your project.

Learning goals:

- *Identify what kind of humanities data you have (or want) to create a digital project that uses mapping.*
- *Evaluate your resources and constraints relevant to choosing a mapping tool.*
- *Apply this knowledge to planning to map your own projects using the most appropriate tool(s) for your needs.*

HUMANITIES RESEARCH DATA

What does data look like in the humanities?

correspondence
estate inventory
shipping manifest
diary or journal
financial ledger
photograph
drawing or other work of visual art
burial, birth, or wedding record
newspaper
property record or deed
tax list
notebook
memorandum
telegram
speech
material culture item
genealogy
recipe or menu
film, novel, or other cultural artifact

directory
logbook
blueprints
built structure
price list
advertisement
legislation
government proceedings
transcript
interview
autobiography
schematic or plan
diagram or chart
land survey or map
polling results
census
audio or video recording
publication

... and more!

RESOURCE MAPPING

What resources and limitations do you need to keep in mind as you choose a tool?

EXERCISE: RESOURCE MAPPING

I have more of...

I have less of...

Funding

Time

People/Labor

Training or comfort using new tech tools

Access to tools or data

Readiness of source material

NEEDS & PRIORITIES

What are your top 3 priorities?

ROUND ROBIN

*What materials are you working with? What are
your ideas for mapping them?*

PLATFORM ROUNDUP

GOOGLE MYMAPS

Example: Boston's Black Heritage Trail

google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1hGDxOjseZI6P2RGF08GC7zLyh8JraPFR&ll=42.3591296316346%2C-71.0671342&z=17

This map was created by a user. Learn how to create your own.

Boston's Black Heritage Tr...

Explore Boston's Black Heritage Trail (National Parks Service).
490 views
Published on November 2, 2022

SHARE

Sites (Blue=Public, Yellow=Private)

- African Meeting House
- Abiel Smith School
- Smith Court Residences
- 3 Smith Ct
- ... 10 more

Walking Path

Black Heritage Trail

Made with Google My Maps

Map data ©2024 Google Terms 200 ft

Keyboard shortcuts

GOOGLE MYMAPS

Pros

- Very easy to use
- Easily import and export data in multiple formats

Cons

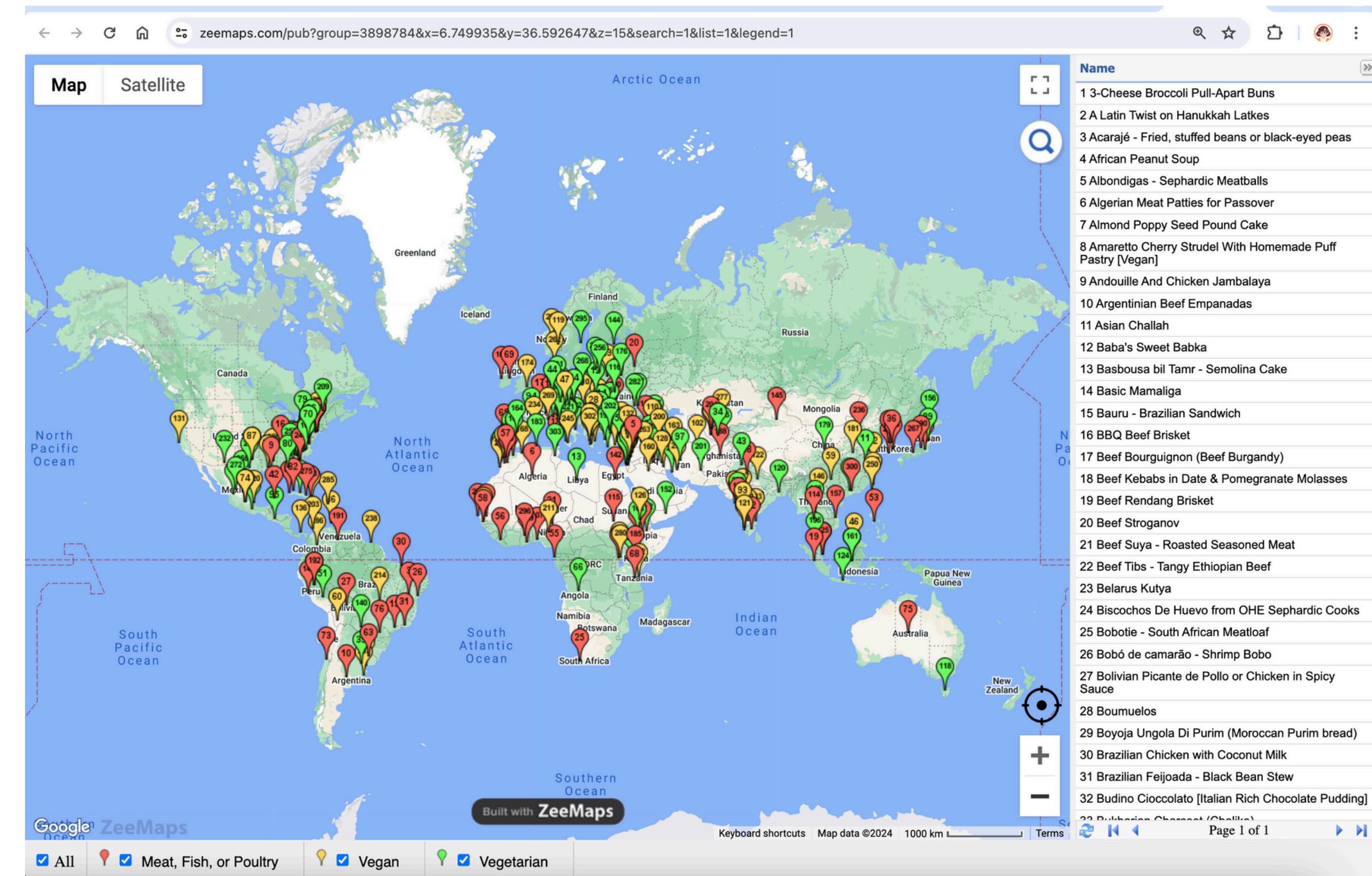
- Need to sign in with a Google account - which means Google owns your data
- Not particularly flashy or aesthetic
- Limitations on what you can display

*Use this tool if
you...*

- Have limited time or budget
- Are mapping for understanding rather than presentation

ZEEMAPS

Example: World Map of Recipes



ZEEMAPS

Pros

- Crowdsourcing capability
- Easy data import
- Data privacy measures (HIPAA compliant)

Cons

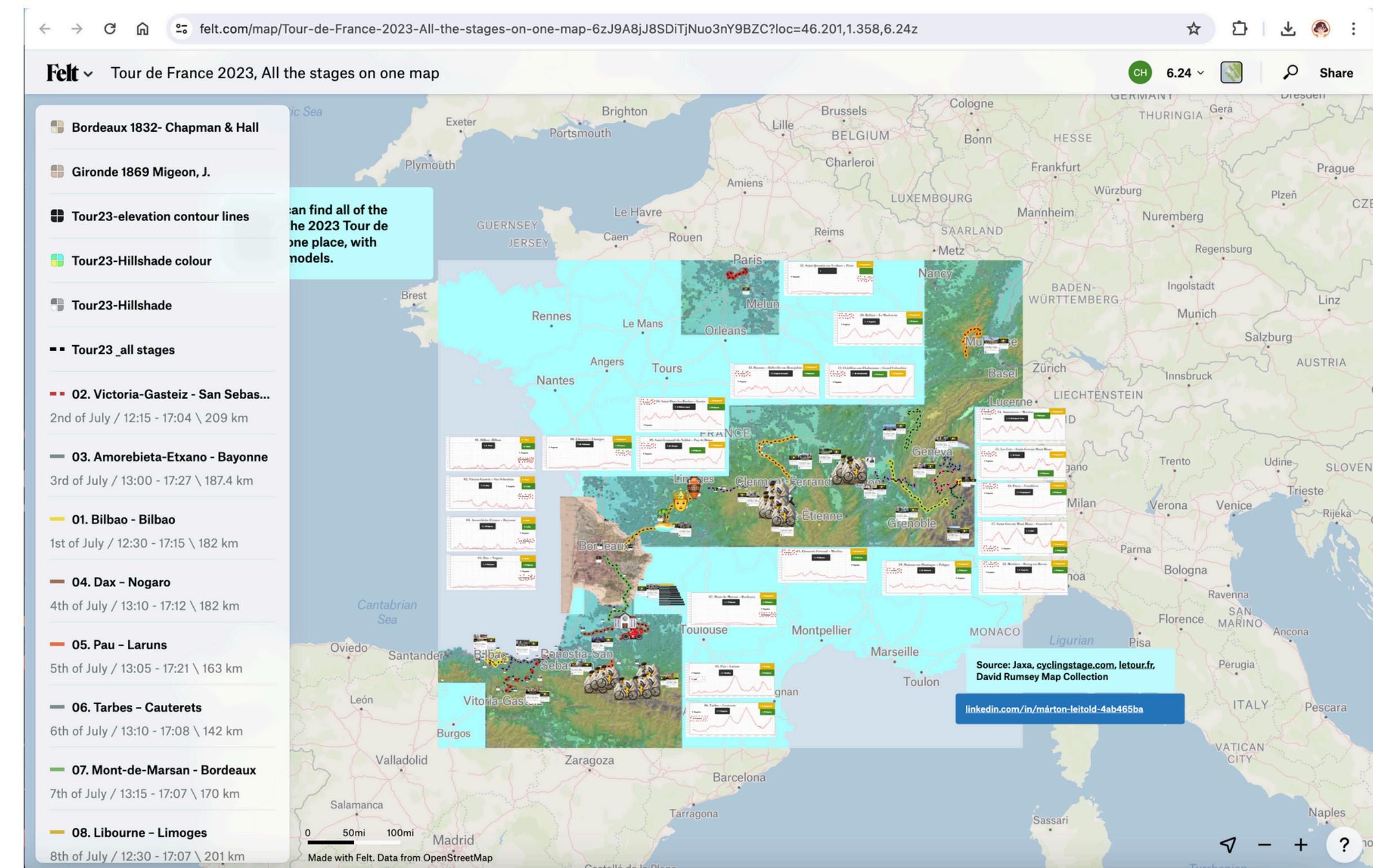
- Free up to a point
- Export not possible
- Limited functionality

*Use this tool if
you...*

- Have limited time or budget and want an alternative to Google products
- Need data privacy
- Would like to crowdsource

FELT

Example: Tour de France 2023



FELT

Pros

- Aesthetic and interactive
- Allows for multiple data sources and types
- Annotatable maps (add pins, drawings, polygons, text, photos, docs, and video)

Cons

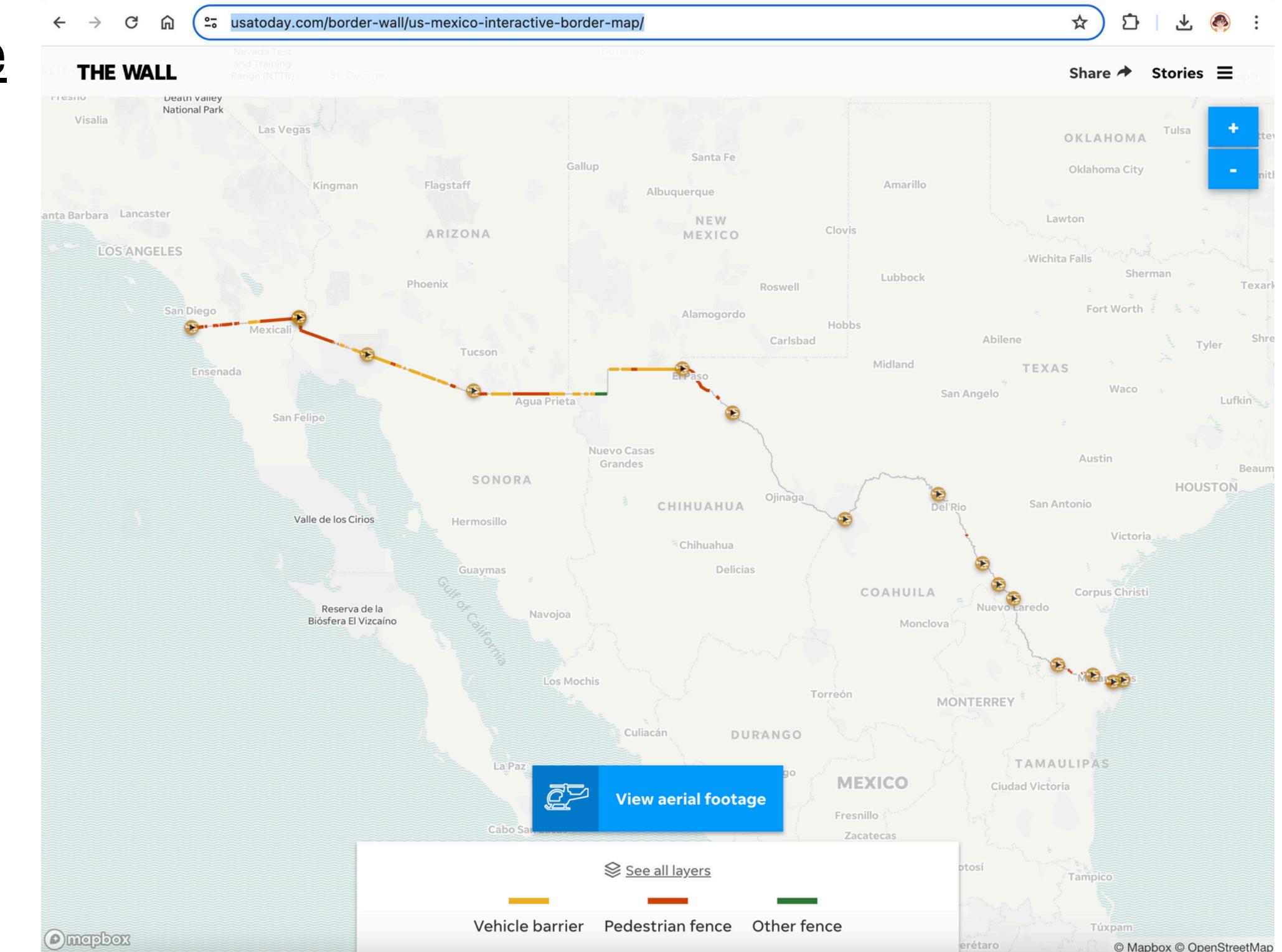
- Very limited free tier; most features are paid (if you are an instructor, you can get verified for a free higher tier account)
- Takes a little practice to get the hang of it

*Use this tool if
you...*

- Are an educator and can get premium features for free
- Have some time and want to learn more about GIS

MAPBOX STUDIO

Example: USA Today “The Wall” interactive map



MAPBOX STUDIO

Pros

- Easily import and export data in multiple formats
- Lots of customization options - many use a simple interface
- Great tutorials and product support for learning the platform

Cons

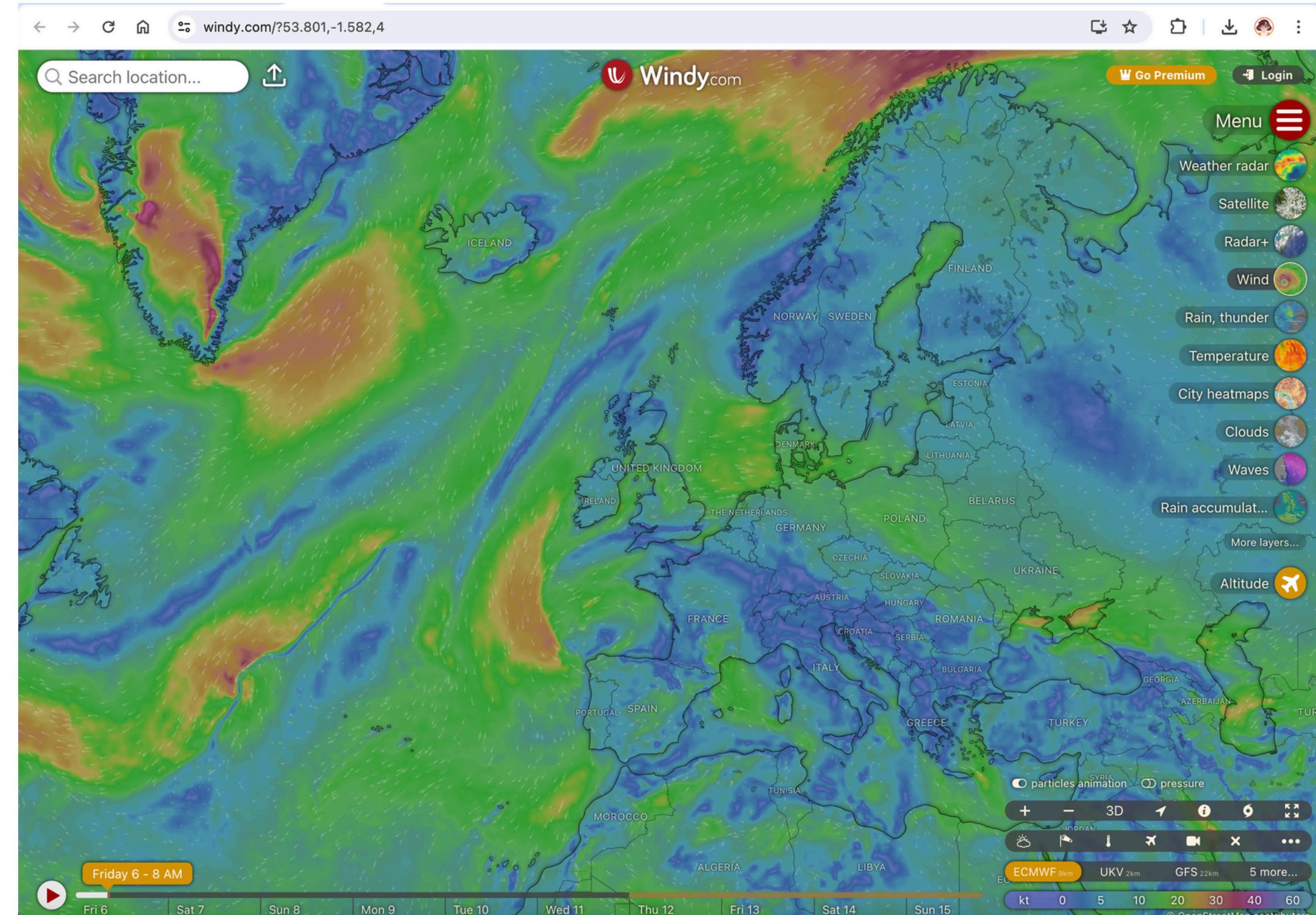
- Free up to a point
- Combining multiple data sources and types can be challenging and may require data cleanup/normalization beforehand
- Learning curve

*Use this tool if
you...*

- Need to use multiple formats of data
- Have some time to learn the ins and outs of the platform

LEAFLET

Example: “Windy”



LEAFLET

Pros

- Free and open source
- Very customizable

Cons

- Requires some knowledge of HTML, CSS, and JS
- Need your own web server to host maps, site, and data

*Use this tool if
you...*

- Have some experience building websites or the budget to hire someone who does
- Want complete control over the data and design of your map

ARCGIS ONLINE

Example: Morningside Heights Historic District Explorer

The screenshot shows a 3D web map interface for the Morningside Heights Historic District. At the top, the URL is nyclpc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer3d/index.html?id=abd5f6ae90f049bd9359681c9ac1402d. The title bar reads "NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission" and "Morningside Heights Historic District Explorer". The main content area features a black and white photograph of a row of multi-story buildings with the text "Morningside Heights Historic District Explorer" overlaid. Below this is a color-coded legend titled "Period of Construction" with a gradient from red (Older) to yellow (Newer), and categories: Pre-1900, 1900 - 1909, 1910 - 1919, 1920 - 1929, and Post-1929. A note explains that buildings are colored based on their construction period. At the bottom left is a copyright notice: "NYC OpenData, State of New Jersey, Esri, HERE, Garmin, GeoTechnologies, Inc., USGS, EPA | Source: Airbus, USGS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, NLS, OS, NMA, Geodatasyrelsen, GSA, GSI and the GIS User Community". At the bottom right is the text "Powered by Esri".

ARCGIS ONLINE

Pros

- Aesthetic
- Lots of support for learning and creating (online and through the Penn Libraries)
- Robust capabilities

Cons

- Requires an expensive subscription, like the one offered by Penn
- Learning curve can be steep depending on complexity of features you want to use

*Use this tool if
you...*

- You want something that looks really good
- You have a lot of time or a budget
- You want to jump into the deep end of GIS and mapping

QUESTIONS
 &
COMMENTS
