

Build tutorial on open-source hardware options for SNR-based GPS/GNSS Reflectometry (GNSS-R)



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(Portions and images reused from Adafruit tutorials, by Lady Ada and others.)

Updates:

- February 16, 2021: enclosure hole for the antenna, outdoors testing, site guidelines.
- February 26, 2020: miscellaneous.

Table of Contents

0: List of materials	2
1: Setup the Arduino firmware	5
1.1 - Download and install the Arduino IDE	5
1.2 - Install Adafruit drivers for the IDE	5
1.3 - Install Adafruit drivers for Windows	6
1.4 - Format the SD card to file system FAT32	7
1.5 - Upload the Arduino sketch	7
1.6 - Source code options	8
1.7 - Update the GPS firmware (optional)	8
2: Connecting the electronics	9
2.1 - Connecting the Arduino and GPS shield	9
2.2 - Preparing the solar power supply system	10
2.2.1 - Installing the capacitor	11
2.2.2 - Adding temperature sensing	11
2.2.3 - Adjusting the maximum charging current	12
2.2.4 - Preparing the Arduino power plug	13
2.2.5 - Pre-charging the battery	13
2.3 - Putting it all together	14
2.3.1 - Connecting the power supply	14
2.3.1.1 - Connecting the charger, solar panel, and battery	14
2.3.1.1 - Connecting the power supply to the Arduino	14
2.3.2 - Connecting the antenna	15
2.3.3 - First look	16
3: Preparing the enclosure	18
4: Mounting it outdoors	20
4.1 Basic precautions	20
4.2 Preparing the mast and base	21
4.3 Solar panel support	23
4.4 Fixing the enclosure on the mast	24
4.5 Adjusting the solar panel orientation	25
5: Checks	26
5.1 Activity LEDs	26
5.2 PC Serial	27
5.3 Data files	28
5.3.1 File extensions	28
5.3.2 File names	28
5.3.3 File contents	28

0: List of materials

You can use this link to a bill of materials with all the necessary items:

<https://www.adafruit.com/wishlists/469752>

For convenience, we list below the items in the Adafruit shopping cart; other shops can be used for some of the items.

- 1) 1x - 2.1mm female/male barrel jack extension cable - 1.5m / 5 ft

<https://www.adafruit.com/product/327>



- 2) 1x - 3.5 / 1.3mm or 3.8 / 1.1mm to 5.5 / 2.1mm DC Jack Adapter Cable

<https://www.adafruit.com/product/2788>



- 3) 1x - GPS Antenna - External Active Antenna - 3-5V 28dB 5 Meter SMA

<https://www.adafruit.com/product/960>



- 4) 1x - CR1220 12mm Diameter - 3V Lithium Coin Cell Battery - CR1220

<https://www.adafruit.com/product/380>



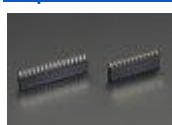
- 5) 1x - SMA to uFL/u.FL/IPX/IPEX RF Adapter Cable

<https://www.adafruit.com/product/851>



- 6) 1x - Header Kit for Feather - 12-pin and 16-pin Female Header Set

<https://www.adafruit.com/product/2886>



7) 1x - Adafruit Ultimate GPS FeatherWing
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/3133>



8) 1x - Adafruit Feather 32u4 Adalogger
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/2795>



9) 1x - Lithium Ion Battery Pack - 3.7V 4400mAh
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/354>



10) 1x - 10K Precision Epoxy Thermistor - 3950 NTC
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/372>



11) 1x - Waterproof DC Power Cable Set - 5.5/2.1mm [optional]
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/743>



12) 1x - Cable Gland PG-9 size - 0.158" to 0.252" Cable Diameter - PG-9 [optional]
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/761>



13) 1x - USB / DC / Solar Lithium Ion/Polymer charger - v2
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/390>



14) 1x - Huge 6V 6W Solar panel - 6.0 Watt
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/1525>



15) 1x - Through-Hole Resistors - 2.2K ohm 5% 1/4W - Pack of 25
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/2782>



16) 1x - Cable Gland PG-7 size - 0.118" to 0.169" Cable Diameter - PG-7
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/762>



17) 1x - 2.1mm to 2.5mm DC Barrel Plug Adapter
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/2897>



18) 1x - Large Plastic Project Enclosure - Weatherproof with Clear Top
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/905>



19) JST 2-pin Extension Cable with On/Off Switch - JST PH2
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/3064>



20) SD/MicroSD Memory Card (8 GB SDHC)
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/1294>



21) White Nylon Screw and Stand-off Set – M2.5 Thread [optional]
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/3658>

22) USB cable - A/MiniB - 3ft [optional]
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/260>

1: Setup the Arduino firmware

You'll need:

- Adafruit Feather 32u4 Adalogger : item 8
- SD card with file system fat32 : item 20

1.1 - Download and install the Arduino IDE

Available at: <https://www.arduino.cc/en/Main/Software>

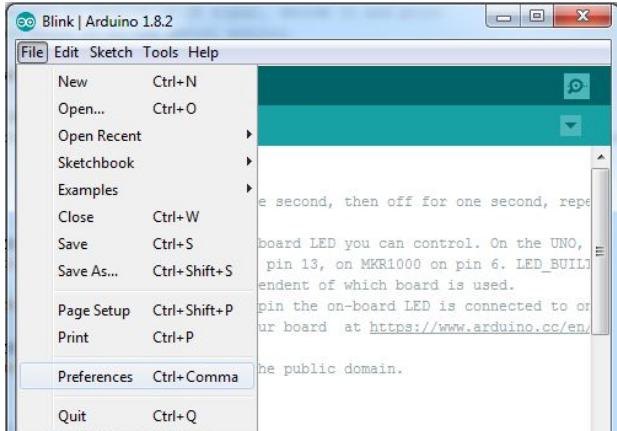
1.2 - Install Adafruit drivers for the IDE

The steps are detailed in this link, but we'll show a summary below.

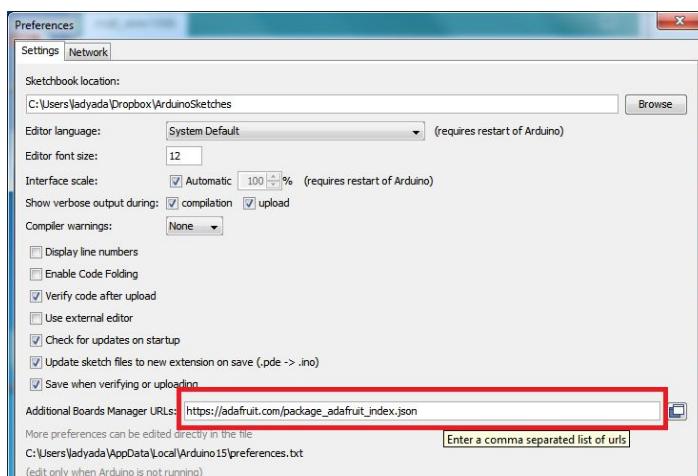
<https://learn.adafruit.com/adafruit-feather-32u4-basic-proto/arduino-ide-setup>

Portion reused from Adafruit tutorial:

"After you have downloaded and installed **the latest version of Arduino IDE**, you will need to start the IDE and navigate to the **Preferences** menu. You can access it from the **File** menu in *Windows* or *Linux*, or the **Arduino** menu on OS X.



A dialog will pop up just like the one shown beside.



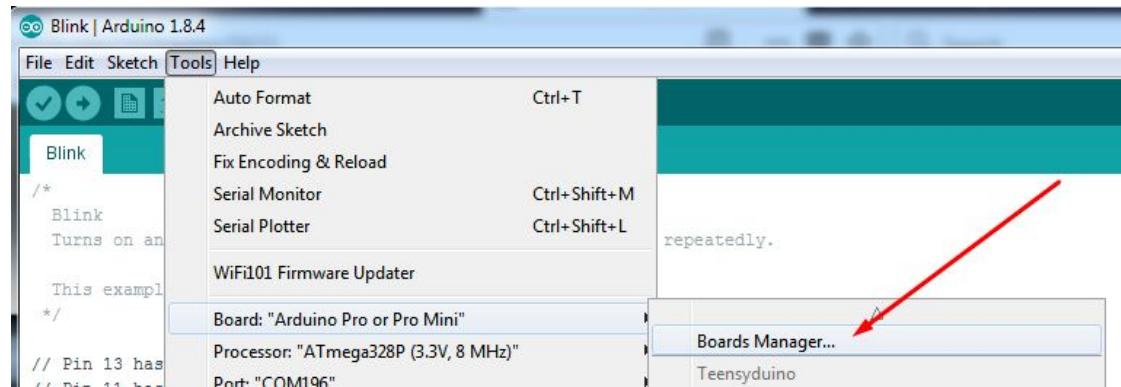
We will be adding a URL to the new **Additional Boards Manager URLs** option. The list of URLs is comma separated, and *you will only have to add each URL once*. New Adafruit boards and updates to existing boards will automatically be picked up by the Board Manager each time it is opened. The URLs point to index files that the Board Manager uses to build the list of available & installed boards.

Insert this link in the Arduino IDE preferences:

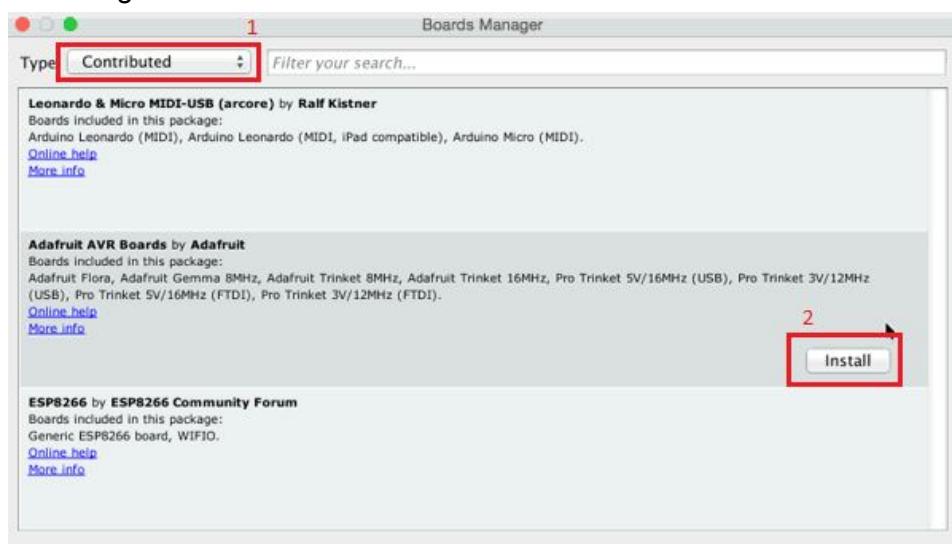
https://adafruit.github.io/arduino-board-index/package_adafruit_index.json

Click “Ok” button to save.

Now that you have added the appropriate URLs to the Arduino IDE preferences, you can open the **Boards Manager** by navigating to the **Tools->Board** menu.



Once the Board Manager opens, click on the category drop down menu on the top left hand side of the window and select **Contributed**. You will then be able to select and install the boards supplied by the URLs added to the preferences. In the example below, we are installing support for **Adafruit AVR Boards**, but the same applies to all boards installed with the Board Manager.



Next, **quit and reopen the Arduino IDE** to ensure that all of the boards are properly installed. You should now be able to select and upload to the new boards listed in the **Tools->Board** menu.”

1.3 - Install Adafruit drivers for Windows

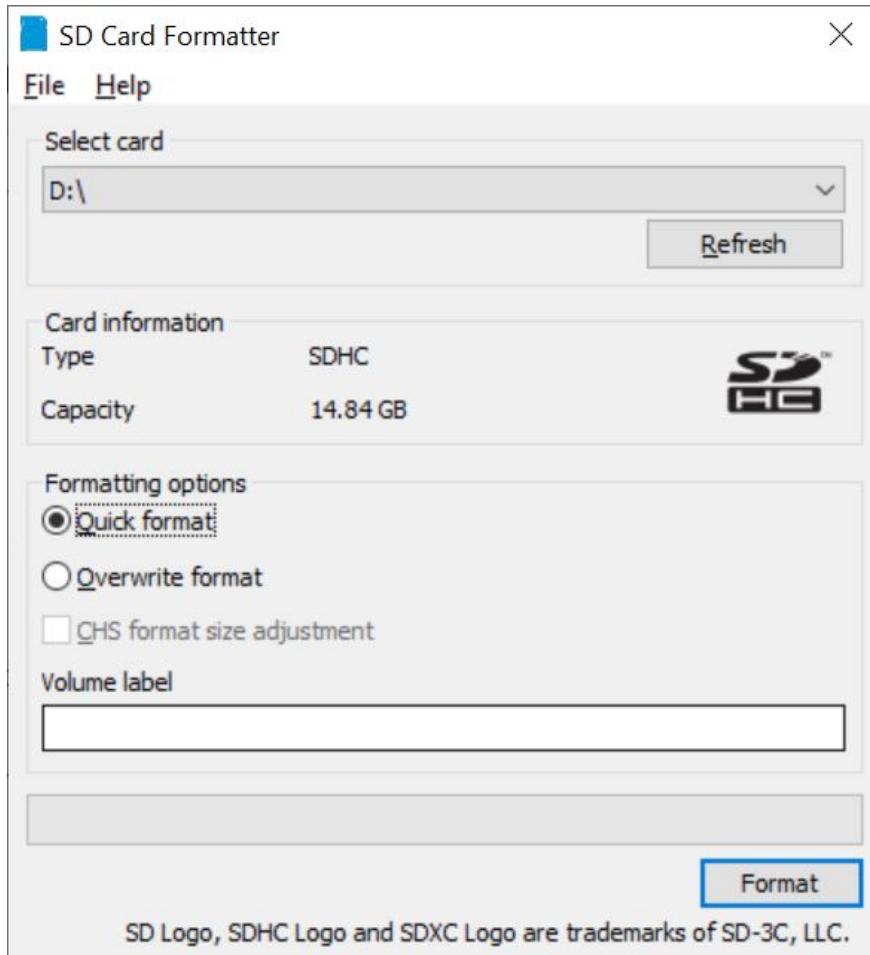
Download and run the installer:

https://github.com/adafruit/Adafruit_Windows_Drivers/releases/tag/2.3.4

1.4 - Format the SD card to file system FAT32

We recommend to use this software to format the SD card:

<https://www.sdcard.org/downloads/formatter/>

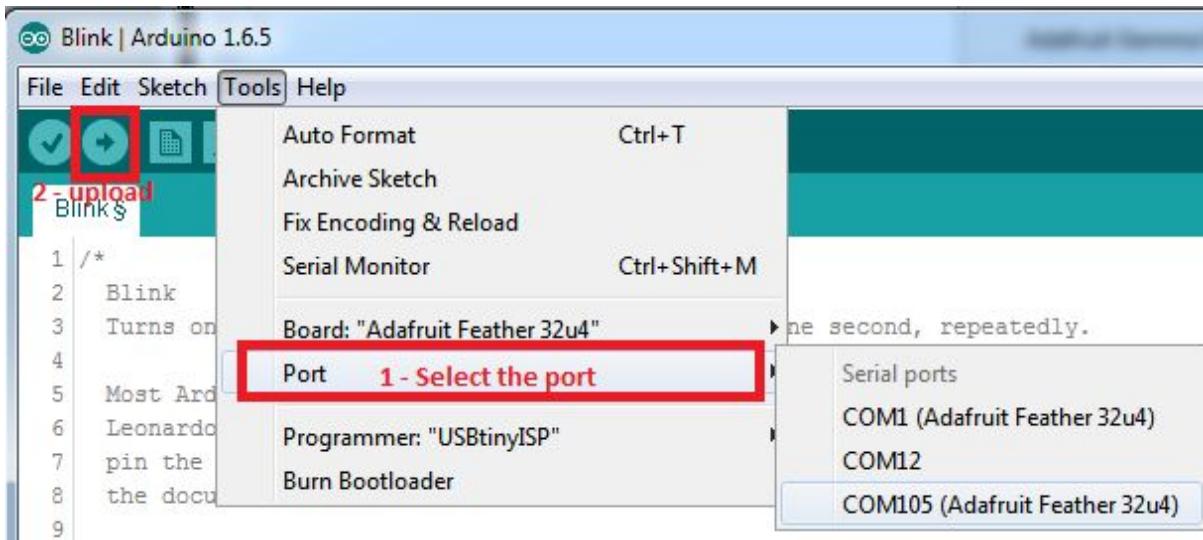


1.5 - Upload the Arduino sketch

0) Download the source code on this link and open it on the Arduino IDE:

<http://cdn.jsdelivr.net/gh/fgnievinski/mphw/code/ardu/ardu.ino>

1) Plug in the Feather 32u4 to the computer using a USB cable. Wait for it to be recognized by the operating system (it just takes a few seconds). It will create a serial COM port, which you can select from the dropdown menu -- it'll even be 'indicated' as Feather 32u4!



2) Finally, we need to upload the firmware, that makes the Arduino system run. Simply click on the Upload button (arrow icon) and wait (it may take a while to finish).

1.6 - Source code options

The following are a few options in the source code that the user may wish to modify.

File naming mode: you can change how often the system will save the data, creating a file per day or per hour. Search for the declaration of the variable `fileDuration` in the source code and set it to 'H' to save by hour or 'D' to save by day. See section 7.2.2 for more details.

Battery update interval: you can monitor the battery voltage while the system is running. Find the declaration "`BATTERY_UPDATE_INTERVAL`" in the source code to choose the interval (in milliseconds).

GPS update interval: defines how often the GPS data will be updated (in milliseconds); defined in `GPS_UPDATE_INTERVAL`.

1.7 - Update the GPS firmware (optional)

The GPS module has its own firmware, independent from the Arduino firmware as installed above. The GPS factory default firmware outputs SNR values as integer numbers, i.e., with 1-dB numerical resolution. Other GPS firmware versions may offer greater resolution, outputting SNR as decimal values. This section serves just a reminder in case you have access to such a GPS firmware.

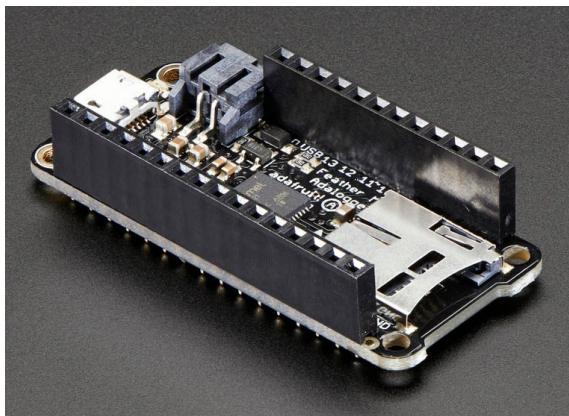
2: Connecting the electronics

2.1 - Connecting the Arduino and GPS shield

You'll need:

- Adafruit Feather 32u4 Adalogger : item 8
- Header Kit for Feather - 12-pin and 16-pin Female Header Set : item 6
- Adafruit Ultimate GPS FeatherWing : 7

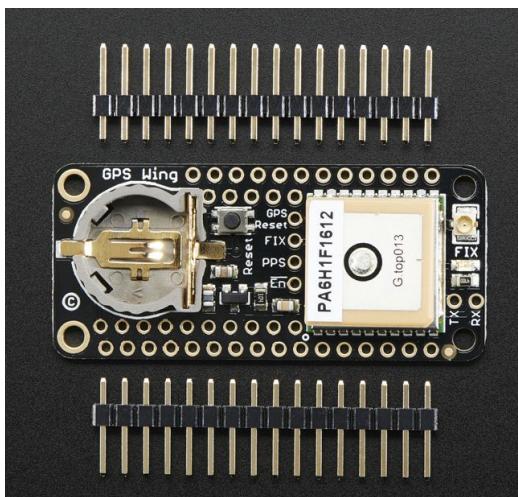
Solder the "Header Kit for Feather - 12-pin and 16-pin Female Header Set" on the Feather as below.



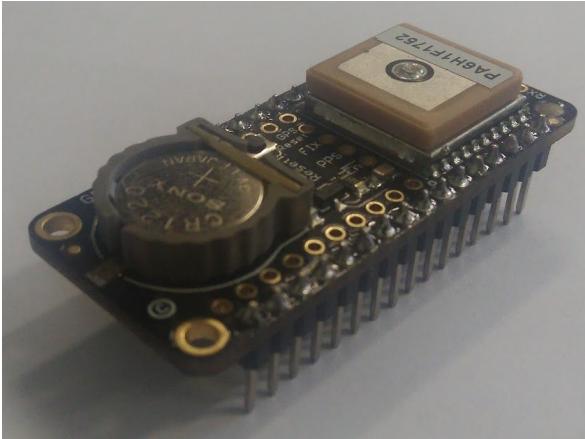
Check "Soldering on Female Header" at this link for detailed instructions:

https://cdn-learn.adafruit.com/downloads/pdf/adafruit-feather-32u4-adalogger.pdf?timestamp=1557404503#_WKANCHOR_q

Prepare the GPS module to attach on the Adafruit Feather soldering the male headers:



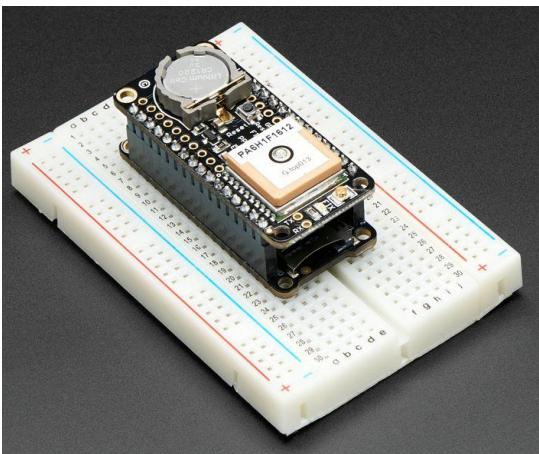
Make sure to solder the pins with the longer part facing down



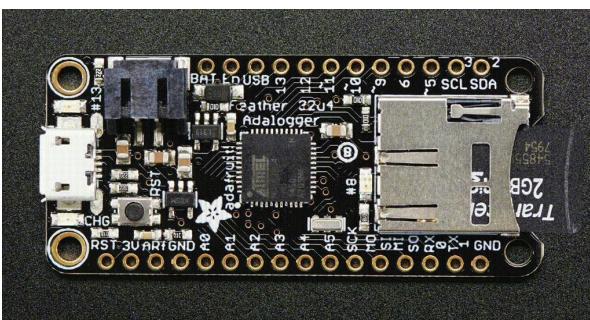
Check “Adafruit Ultimate GPS featherwing” for details:

<https://learn.adafruit.com/adafruit-ultimate-gps-featherwing?view=all>

Finally, we can connect the boards pressing down
(note: the protoboard in white is not necessary):



Insert the SD card into the slot on the Adafruit Feather Adalogger:



2.2 - Preparing the solar power supply system

You'll need:

- USB / DC / Solar Lithium Ion/Polymer charger - v2 : item 13

- Huge 6V 6W Solar panel - 6.0 Watt : item 14
- Lithium Ion Battery Pack - 3.7V 4400mAh : item 9
- 10K Precision Epoxy Thermistor - 3950 NTC : item 10
- JST 2-pin Extension Cable with On/Off Switch - JST PH2 : item 19

2.2.1 - Installing the capacitor

The first thing to do before starting to charge with a solar panel, is to install the large capacitor on the USB / DC / Solar Lithium Ion/Polymer charger. Watch out to check the polarity of the capacitor, make sure the positive lead of the capacitor goes into the pad marked with a plus sign (+)!

Follow these steps to prepare the capacitor for the solar charger:

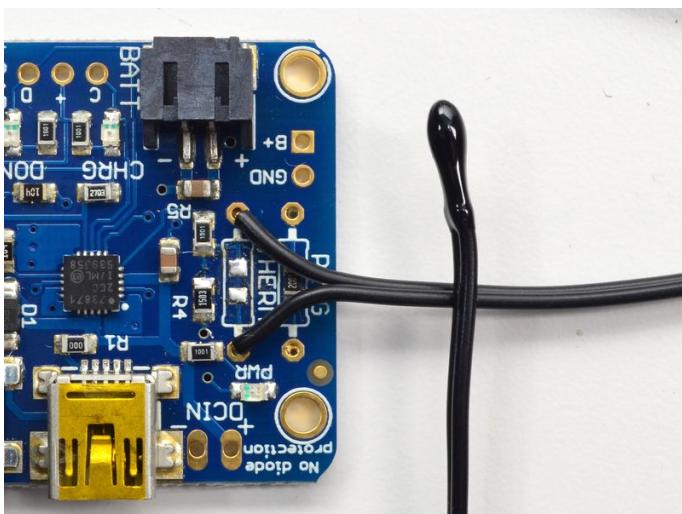
<https://learn.adafruit.com/usb-dc-and-solar-lipoly-charger/solar-charger-preparation>



2.2.2 - Adding temperature sensing

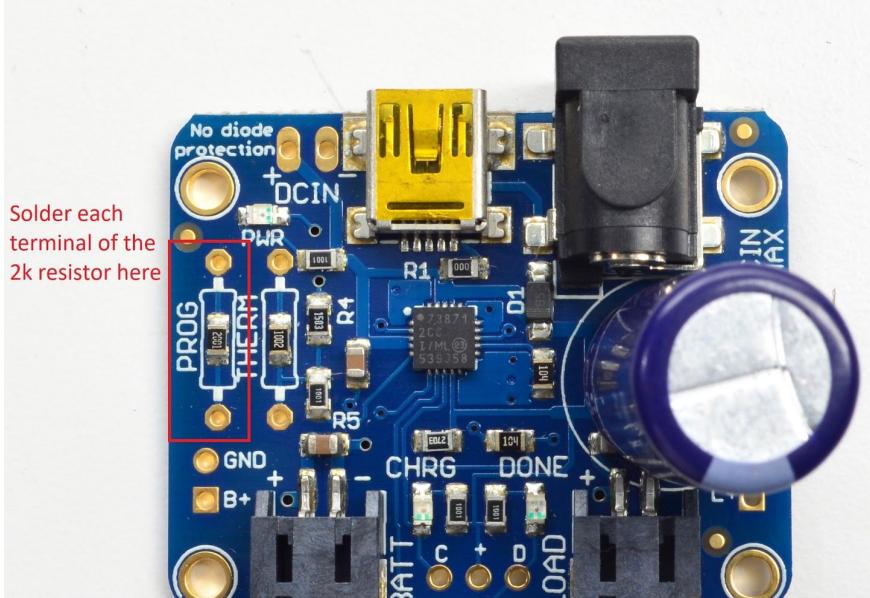
Portion reused from Adafruit tutorial:

“Remove the 10K surface mount resistor from the **THERM** pads (or cut the trace going to it) and solder in a 10K NTC thermistor. Test out the system by trying to charge while you place the thermistor in a freezer or against some ice, as well as in a cup of > 50°C hot water. The charger should stop charging the battery. Once you are sure it is working, attach the sensing element (the epoxy bulb in this case) so it is resting against the battery.”

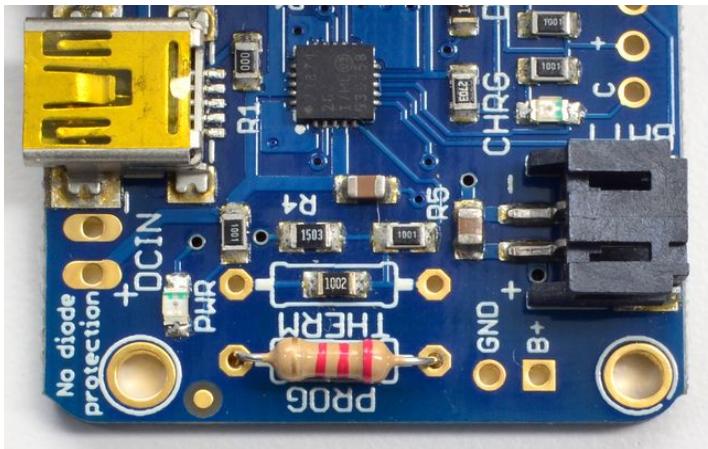


2.2.3 - Adjusting the maximum charging current

For the recommended battery (4400mAh capacity), solder a 2k-ohm resistor over the existing one in the PROG pads (or remove the existing one and solder a 1k-ohm resistor):



After doing that, you'll have a thing like this:



For details, please refer to:

<https://learn.adafruit.com/usb-dc-and-solar-lipoly-charger?view=all#adjusting-the-max-charge-current-5-20>

Portion reused from Adafruit tutorial:

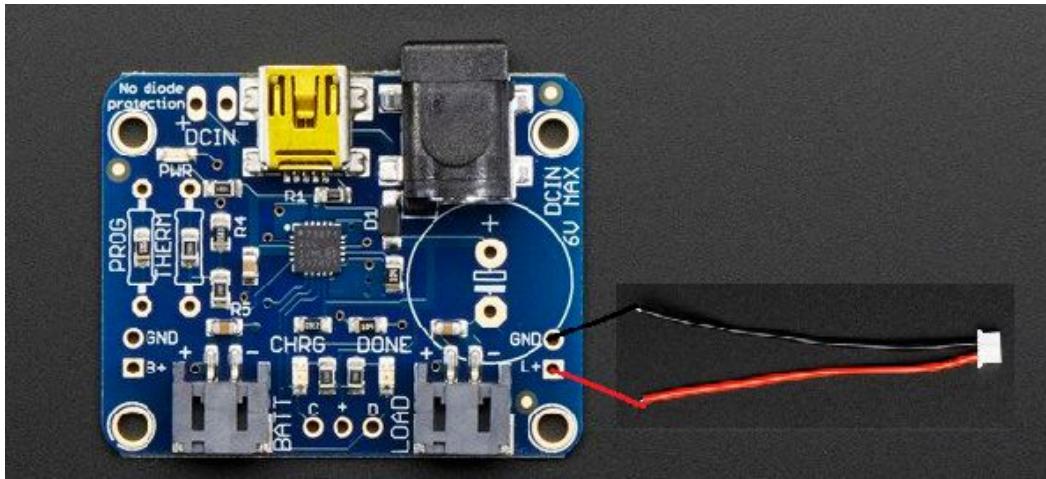
“CAUTION: This modification is indicated only for batteries bigger than 2000mAh!

The USB/Solar charger comes with a preset rate of 500mA which will work for USB ports, USB wall adapters and solar panels up to 3 Watts. If you have a project that uses a larger

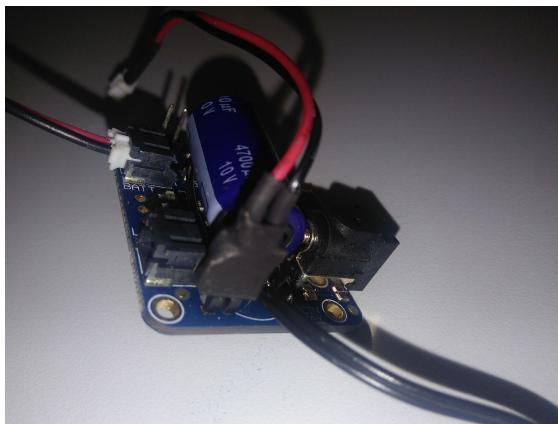
panel, or perhaps some other sort of setup, you can easily adjust the current by soldering a resistor into the **PROG** pads."

2.2.4 - Preparing the Arduino power plug

You can solder the black and the red wires here to connect the Feather: we recommend applying some silicone glue to avoid breaking the wires



As an alternative, we've soldered a pair of male pins to the board and soldered a pair of female plugs to the wires, using heat-shrink tubing for protection:



2.2.5 - Pre-charging the battery

We recommend fully charging the battery in the office, using a USB cable (with miniB connector). Otherwise, the system might run out of power in the first few days, in case you have bad luck to start with several rainy days.

2.3 - Putting it all together

You'll need:

- SMA to uFL/u.FL/IPX/IPEX RF Adapter Cable : item 5
- 2.1mm female/male barrel jack extension cable - 1.5m / 5 ft : item 1
- 3.5 / 1.3mm or 3.8 / 1.1mm to 5.5 / 2.1mm DC Jack Adapter Cable : item 2
- all items prepared before

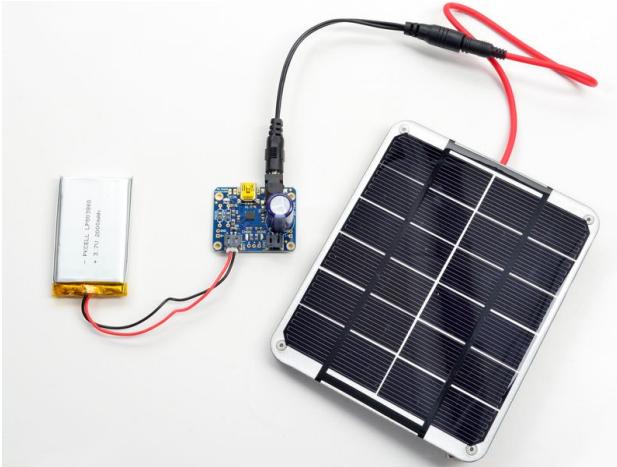
2.3.1 - Connecting the power supply

2.3.1.1 - Connecting the charger, solar panel, and battery

Use the jack adapter cable to connect the solar panel to the charges.

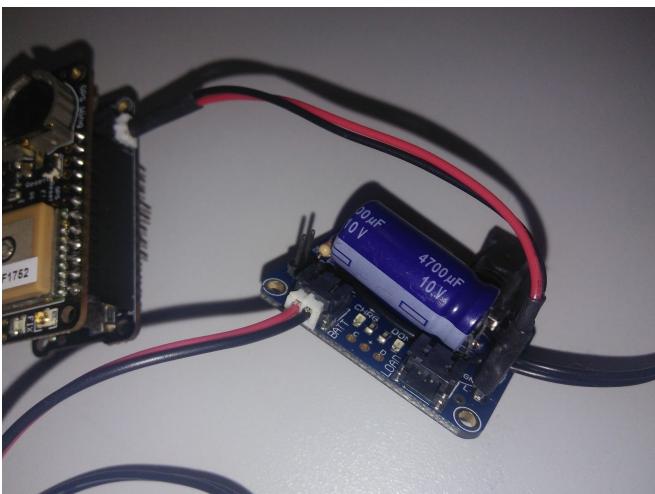
Use the jack extension cable (not shown) for making the cable longer.

Then connect the battery; once you've done that, you'll have something like this:



2.3.1.1 - Connecting the power supply to the Arduino

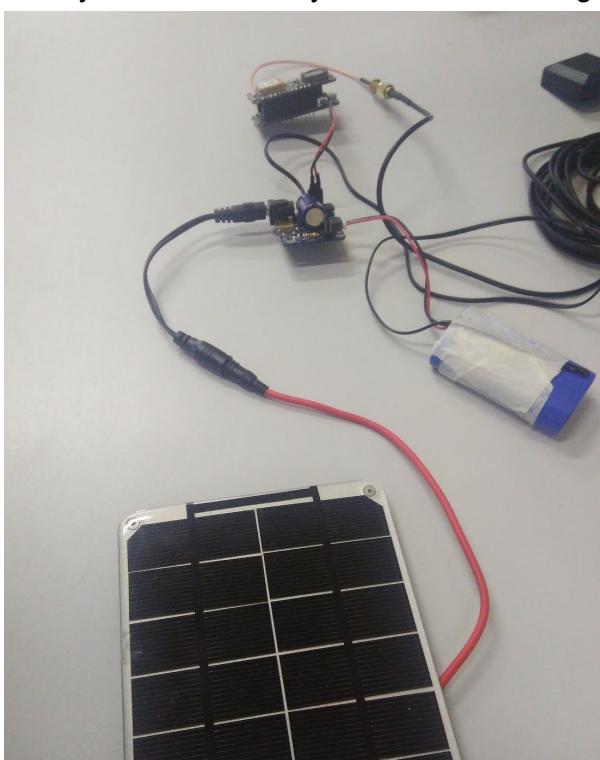
Connect the black and red wire on the Adafruit Arduino:



You may also use the extension cable with On/Off switch:

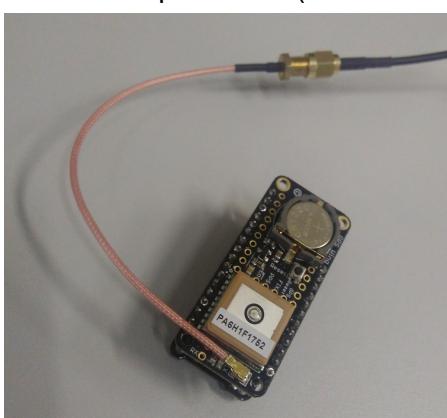


Once you've done that, you'll have something like this:



2.3.2 - Connecting the antenna

Use the adapter cable (SMA to uFl) to connect the GPS shield to the antenna.



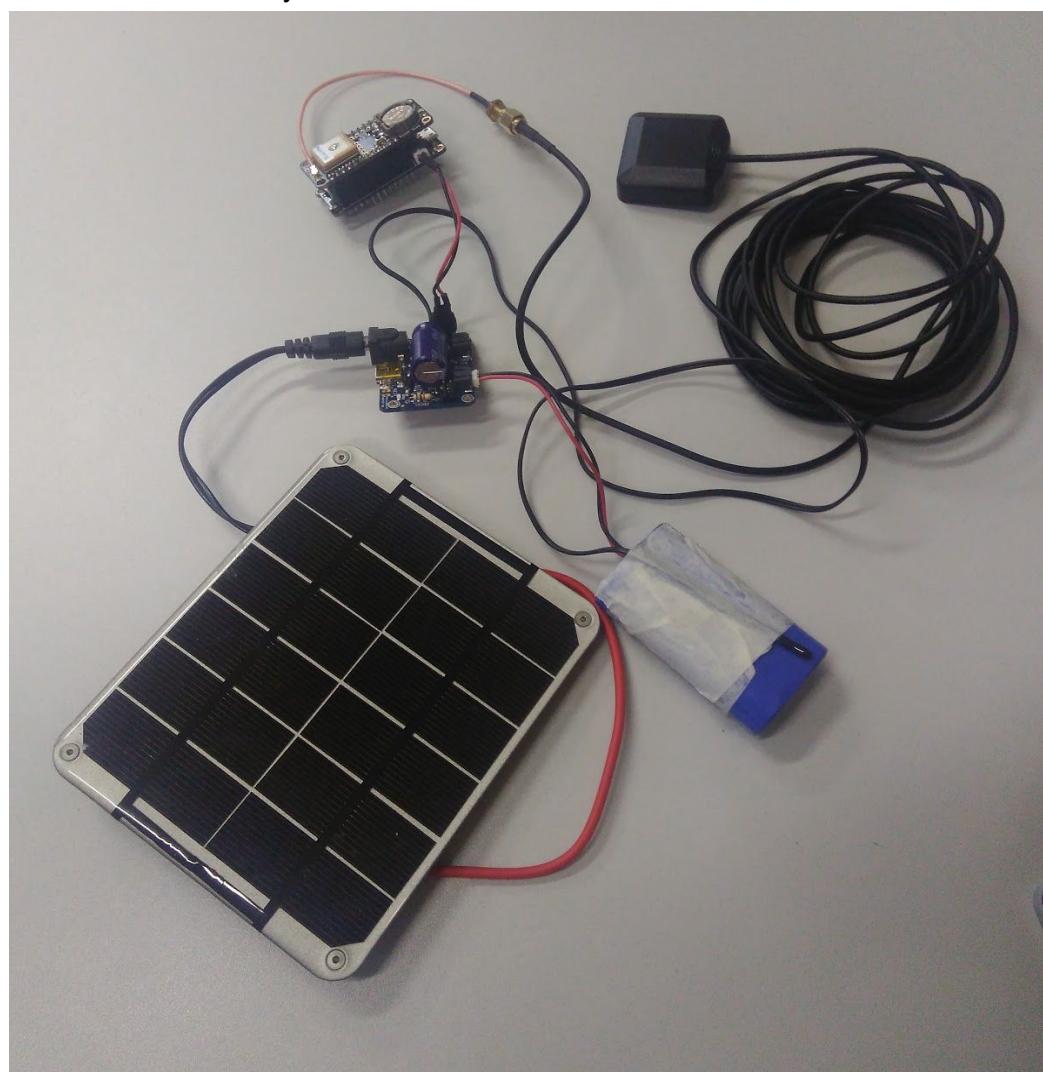
We recommend to put some silicone glue on the connection to avoid disconnecting by mechanical stresses:



(See also section 3 for mechanical fastening of the larger antenna pigtail cable connector.)

2.3.3 - First look

This is a look of our system outside the box:

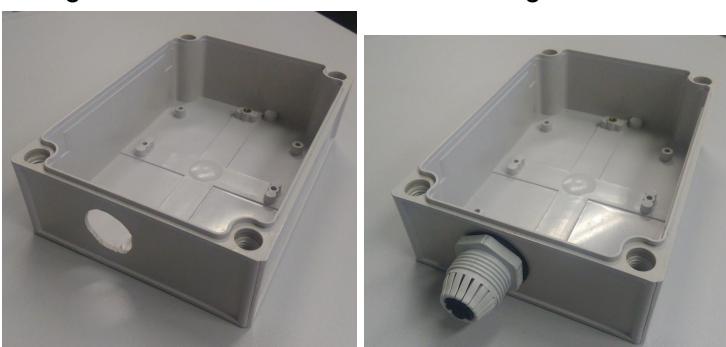


3: Preparing the enclosure

You'll need:

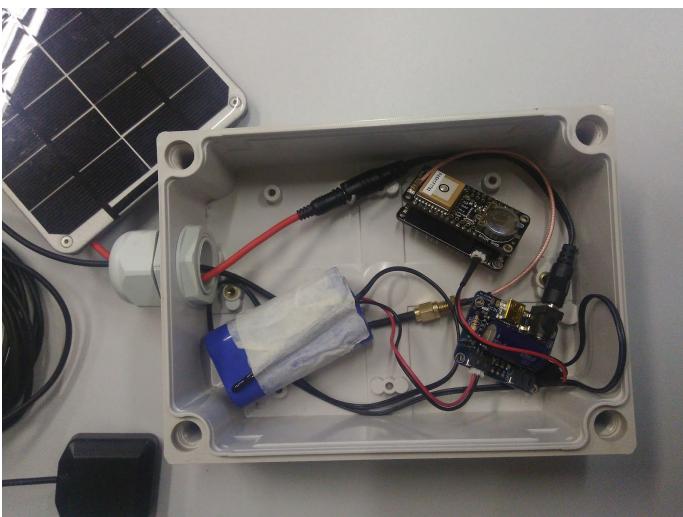
- Cable Gland PG-7 size - 0.118" to 0.169" Cable Diameter - PG-7 : item 16
- Large Plastic Project Enclosure - Weatherproof with Clear Top : item 18
- Waterproof DC Power Cable Set - 5.5/2.1mm [optional] : item 11
- Cable Gland PG-9 size - 0.158" to 0.252" Cable Diameter - PG-9 [optional] : item 12
- White Nylon Screw and Stand-off Set – M2.5 Thread [optional] : item 21
- SMA to uFL/u.FL/IPX/IPEX RF Adapter Cable : item 5

First of all you need to make a hole on the bottom side of the weatherproof box to pass the wiring through. You can use a drill or something alike to do this.



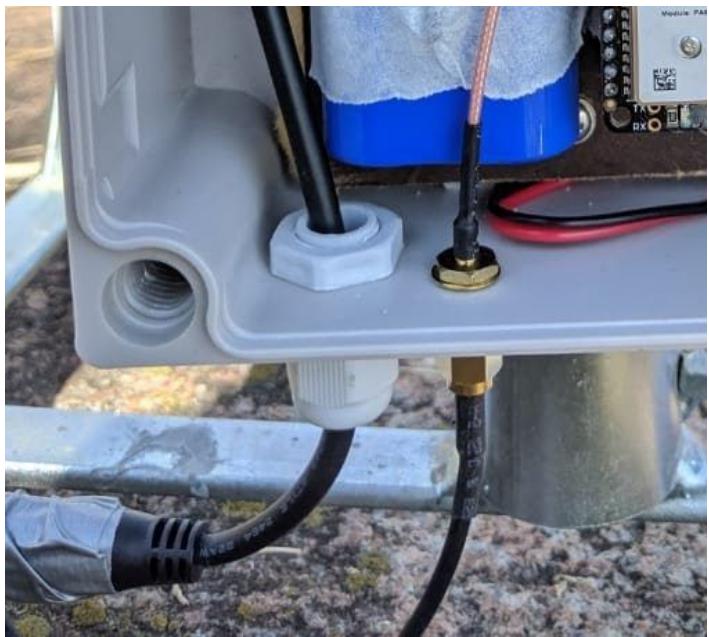
Then you install the cable gland.

Now you have to put all this inside the box, using the cable gland to pass the cables:



Optionally, use items 11 and 12 for a safer enclosure.

For the antenna cable, we recommend drilling a second smaller hole and screwing in the pigtail adapter cable (item 5). The larger coaxial connector (SMA female) should fit in tight in the enclosure's hole. Then fasten the nut, which goes on the enclosure's outside. Finally, screw in the antenna's own cable (SMA male connector). This setup will make the mechanical connection sturdier. See also comment in section 2.3.2 about silicone on the pigtail's smaller connector.



4: Mounting it outdoors

You'll need:

- solar panel support
- stick or mast
- silver tape
- U support
- base (bi-pod, quadri-pod)

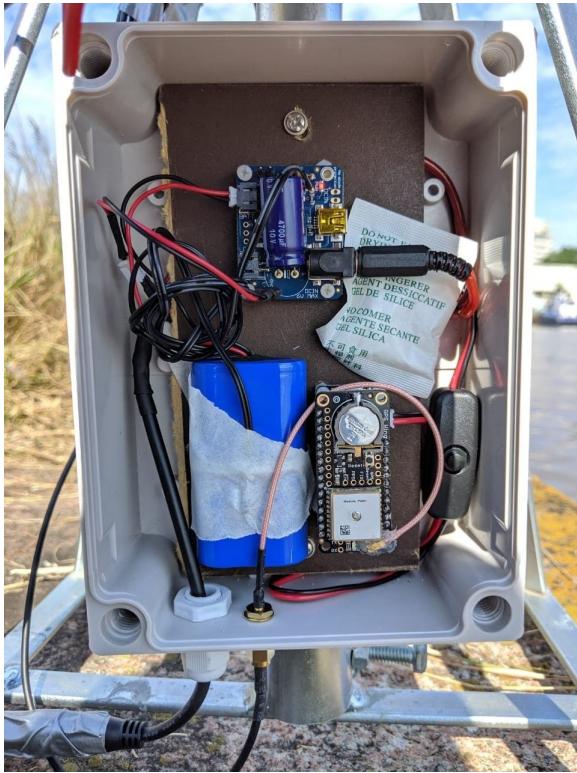
4.1 Basic precautions

Outdoors there is the risk of rain and humidity. So you need to suspend the elements as shown below. Add some packets of silica gel to absorb moisture.



As you can see, even if water enters the enclosure it would not affect the electronics. (This picture is of another enclosure version of our system.)

For a more professional setup, our suggestion is to use stand-off pins:
<https://www.adafruit.com/product/3658>



4.2 Preparing the mast and base

Fix the antenna on the top of a mast. Make sure to have some slack on the antenna cable -- coaxial cables should not have sharp bends!



Setup the base:

Use anchor bolts to the ground for stability.



The base anchor bolts are reinforced by inserting sealant into the hole, such as this:



Use extra pairs of nuts to level the base.



4.3 Solar panel support

You have two options of a solar panel support: buy one or make your own.

This is a model that you can buy at <https://www.voltaicsystems.com/small-bracket>



Alternatively you can simply bend a metal sheet and drill holes as shown below:



4.4 Fixing the enclosure on the mast

To fix the enclosure on the mast you can use a support for TV antenna, which you can find in hardware stores. The support has holes in which you can insert bolts and nuts to hold the components.



4.5 Adjusting the solar panel orientation

The sun incidence varies according to your position on Earth. You need to check the best orientation of the solar panel.

Adjusting tilt (vertical angle):

Check this link to ensure the correct angle <https://www.solarpaneltilt.com/>

Adjusting azimuth (horizontal angle):

Face the equator, opposite from the nearest geographical pole (for example, face north in the southern hemisphere).

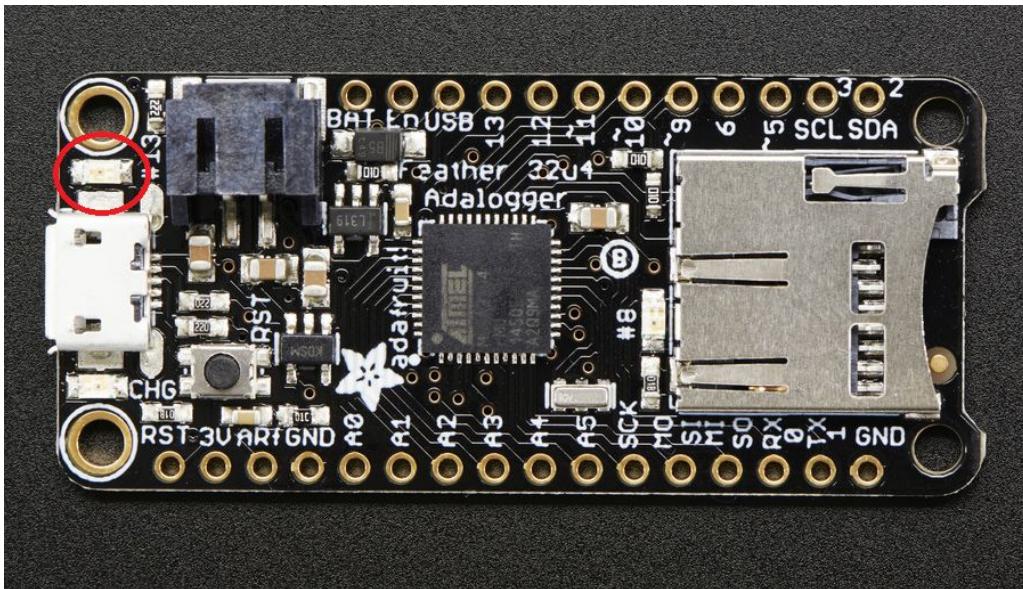


You're all done -- congratulations! :-)

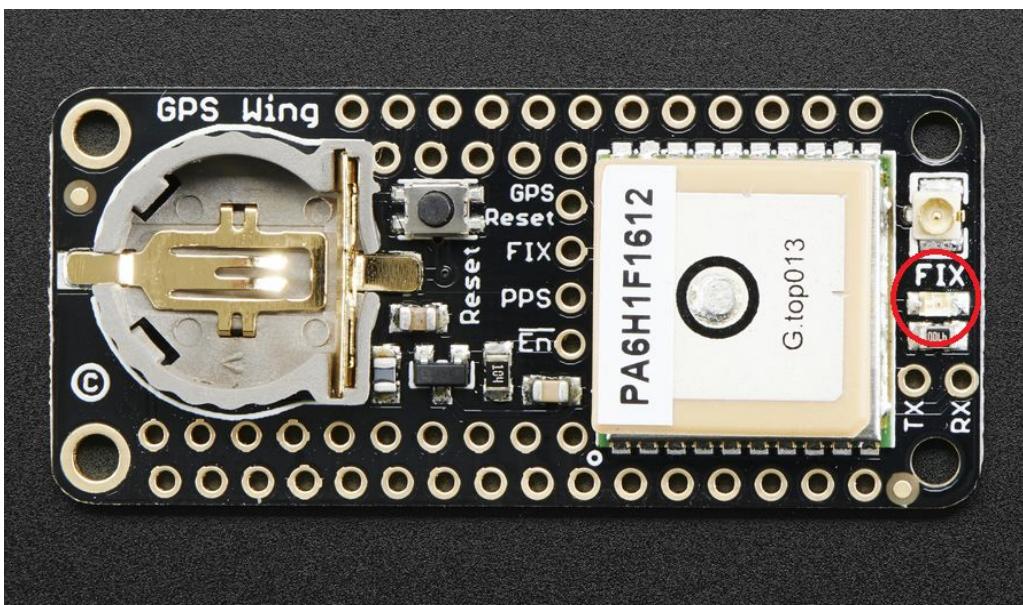
5: Checks

5.1 Activity LEDs

There is a red LED on the Arduino feather, close to the USB port. It will blink every time data is written to the SD card (normally once per second):



There is another red LED in the GPS shield, near the antenna plug. It will blink once per second while searching for satellites. When it has found at least four satellites, it will stop blinking. If that LED does not stop blinking after about one minute, you will need to put the antenna in a better place for improved visibility to the satellites (near a window, for example). Make sure the antenna cables are connected correctly.



5.2 PC Serial

If you plug the Arduino to the PC via USB, you can use the Arduino IDE's Serial Monitor to inspect debug message output.

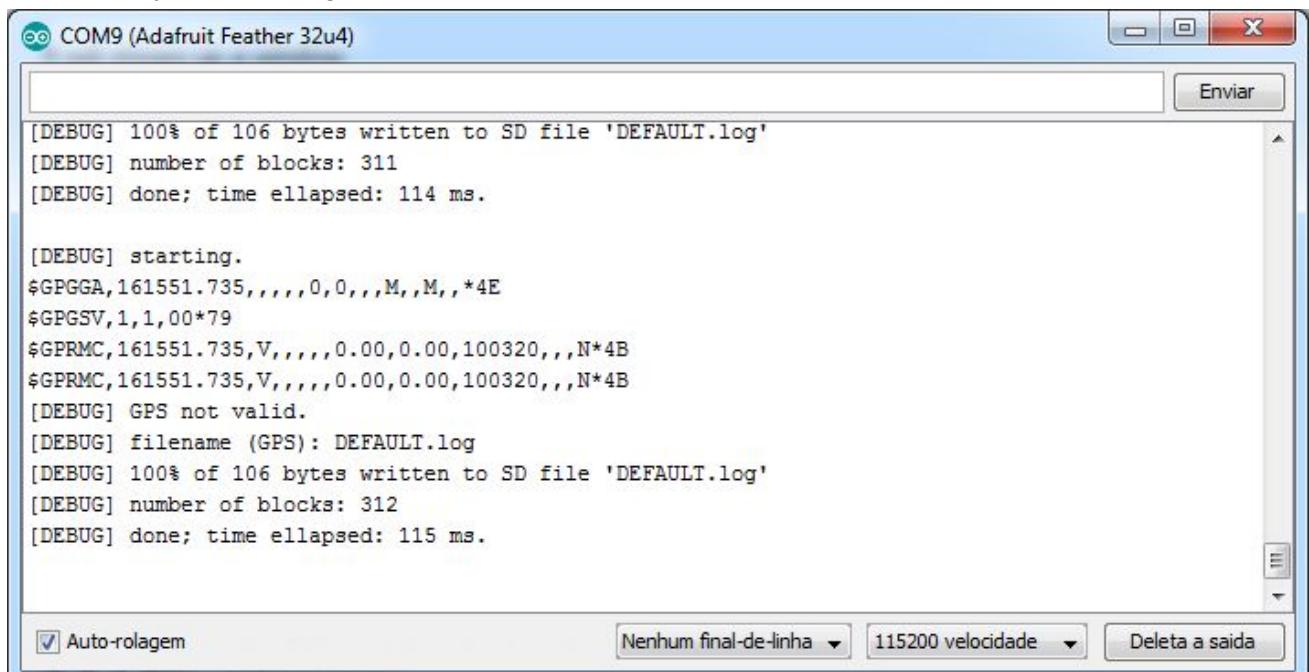
```
// check if USB serial port is open before printing:  
#define DEBUG  
#ifdef DEBUG
```

This is a print screen of the source code. Find it on the .ino source code and make sure that the "#define DEBUG" is uncommented, otherwise nothing shows on the PC Serial.

Now plug in the Arduino to the PC, then open the Serial Monitor by clicking in the top-right corner:



It will display the following window:



5.3 Outdoors testing

Before deployment in the intended location, which might be difficult to access, we recommend running a week long test outdoors in a more convenient location, such as a backyard or rooftop.

Also please go over the following site guidelines:

Geremia-Nievinski, F.; Hobiger, T. (2019) "Site guidelines for multi-purpose GNSS reflectometry stations", Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3660744>

5.4 Data files

Please power off the system before removing the SD card!

Then plug the SD card to a reader in the PC to copy the files.

5.4.1 File extensions

There will be two types of data files, with extensions BAT and LOG.

LOG files

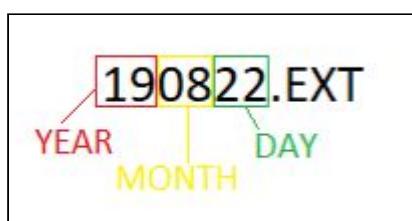
Contains the NMEA sentences. This is the main data output by the system.

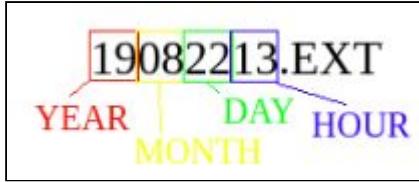
BAT files

Contains the battery voltage measurement. It can be used to monitor the battery state.

5.4.2 File names

As said in section 1.6, the user has two options to organize the data files: by day or by hour. Accordingly, the file names will follow this template:





The system will automatically create a new file for each day or hour (according to the user choice) while the system is running.

5.4.3 File contents

The file contents are ASCII text, for example:

190909.BAT:

```
190909000015 3.98
190909000116 3.99
190909000217 3.98
190909000318 3.99
190909000418 3.99
190909000519 3.99
190909000619 3.99
190909000720 3.98
190909000821 3.99
190909000921 3.98
190909001022 3.99
```

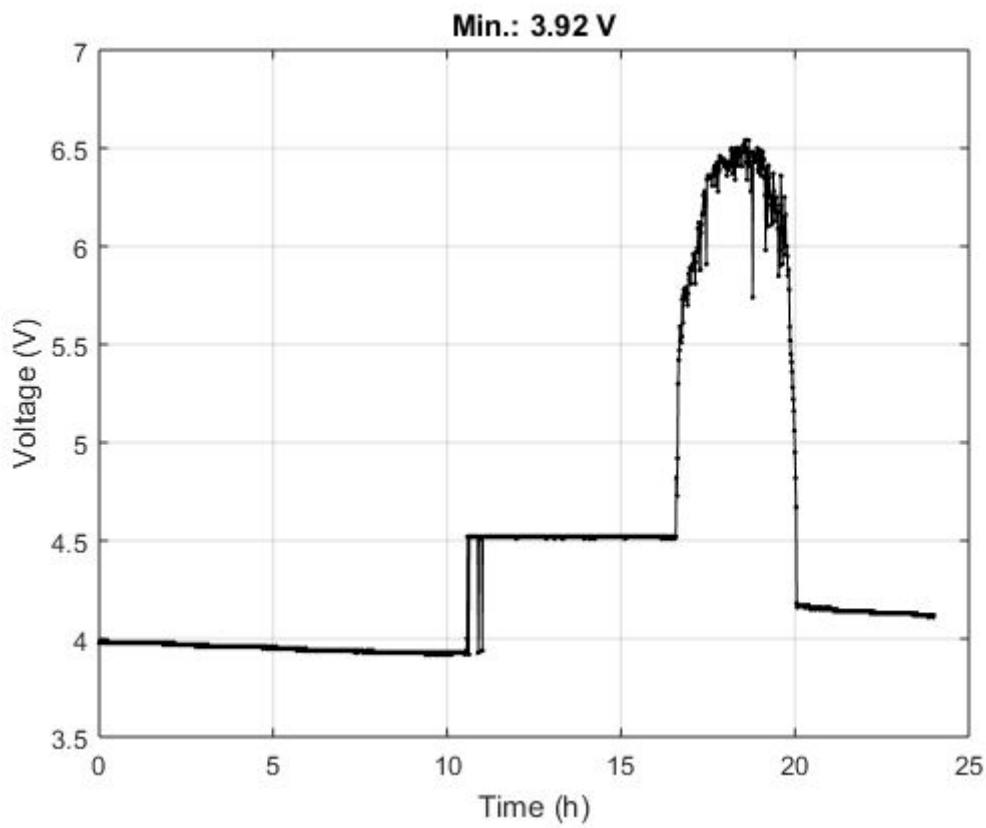
190110.LOG:

```
$GPGGA,000000.000,3001.2761,S,05113.2831,W,1,10,0.92,4.8,M,4.5,M,,*5A
$GPGSV,3,1,12,18,81,354,48.0,01,64,224,49.4,11,61,286,47.1,22,53,210,45.5*70
$GPGSV,3,2,12,31,46,082,46.5,14,37,140,45.5,03,36,231,38.1,32,19,135,43.1*72
$GPGSV,3,3,12,08,18,336,42.9,17,07,222,49.5,27,03,359,43.7,10,02,088,*6D
$GPRMC,000000.000,A,3001.2761,S,05113.2831,W,0.00,350.26,100119,,,A*65

$GPGGA,000001.000,3001.2761,S,05113.2831,W,1,10,0.92,4.8,M,4.5,M,,*5B
$GPGSV,3,1,12,18,81,354,48.1,01,64,224,49.6,11,61,286,46.1,22,53,210,47.4*71
$GPGSV,3,2,12,31,46,082,46.4,14,37,140,45.3,03,36,231,36.9,32,19,135,42.6*75
$GPGSV,3,3,12,08,18,336,43.7,17,07,222,49.4,27,03,359,43.4,10,02,088,*60
$GPRMC,000001.000,A,3001.2761,S,05113.2831,W,0.01,350.26,100119,,,A*65
```

They can be loaded and plotted in Matlab:

<https://github.com/fgnievinski/mphw/tree/master/code/matlab/battery>



<https://github.com/fgnievinski/mphw/tree/master/code/matlab/demo>

