

# PolarToolkit: Python Tools for Convenient, Reproducible, and Open Polar Science

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## Software

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## Summary

**PolarToolkit** (formerly known as Antarctic-Plots) is a Python package with the goal of making polar (i.e. Antarctic, Arctic, Greenland) research more efficient, reproducible, and accessible. The software does this by providing: 1) convenient functions for downloading and pre-processing a wide range of commonly used polar datasets; 2) tools for common geospatial tasks (i.e. changing data resolution, subsetting data by geographic regions); 3) code to easily create publication-quality maps, data profiles, and cross-sections; and 4) a means to interactively explore datasets.

## Statement of need

A common workflow for a geospatial scientist might be: navigate to an online repository and download a dataset, place this downloaded file in a local folder on their computer, perform some preprocessing steps, such as re-projecting, or interpolating the data, possibly using tools like GMT ([Wessel et al., 2019](#)), perform their scientific analysis on the data, and then create a map with this data using a graphical user interface (GUI) application such as QGIS ([QGIS Development Team, 2024](#)). These workflows typically require many separate tools (i.e. internet browser, file browser, spatial analysis software, and mapping software), and are often manually repeated many times throughout a manuscript revision process and the scientist's career.

PolarToolkit aims to consolidate this workflow to be entirely contained within Python, making it both easier and faster to perform all these steps. Scripting workflows like this has several advantages: 1) it decreases the chance of human errors, for example using an old version of the downloaded data or accidentally altering pre-processing steps, such as referencing a raster of elevation data to the geoid instead of the ellipsoid, and 2) it allows entire workflows to be shared easily between collaborators with a single Python file or Jupyter Notebook.

Written in easy-to-learn Python, and utilizing common geospatial data structures, PolarToolkit is designed to be familiar to use for experienced Python users, while also being approachable for beginner coders. It is built upon several open-source packages, such as [Pooch](#) for data downloading ([Uieda et al., 2020](#)), [PyGMT](#) for creating figures ([Uieda et al., 2021](#)), and [Xarray](#) and [Verde](#) for geospatial data processing ([Hoyer & Hamman, 2017](#); [Uieda, 2018](#)). PolarToolkit is designed for generic work with polar data while there are other packages available for more specific objectives, such as [ITS\\_LIVE](#) for working with glacier velocity data ([ITS\\_LIVE, 2024](#)), [icepyx](#) for working with ICESat-2 data ([Scheick et al., 2023](#)), and [earthspy](#)

for downloading satellite data ([Earthspy, 2024](#)). Other similar software exists but differs from PolarToolkit in being either focused on specific objectives (icepack for glacier flow modelling, [Shapero et al., 2023](#)) or using different programming languages which require users to have paid licenses (Antarctic Mapping Tools, [Greene et al., 2017](#)). Comprehensive documentation, API reference, tutorials, and how-to guides are available at <https://polartoolkit.readthedocs.io/en/>, and development occurs in the [GitHub repository](#).

## PolarToolkit Modules

The key functionality of PolarToolkit is organized into five modules:

Module	Description
<code>regions</code>	Pre-defined or interactively chosen geographic regions
<code>fetch</code>	Functions to download, pre-process, and retrieve cached data
<code>maps</code>	Create high-quality maps tailored to polar settings
<code>profiles</code>	Define a line, sample layers and data along it, and plot the results
<code>utils</code>	Useful functions for common geospatial tasks (e.g. reprojecting, masking)

## Example

The below example demonstrates some of the functionality of PolarToolkit. Running the code will perform the following steps:

- 1) Download (or retrieve cached) datasets from various online repositories:
  - Surface and bed elevation, and ice thickness data from Bedmap2 ([Fretwell et al., 2013](#))
  - Antarctic coastline and groundingline shapefiles ([Depoorter et al., 2013](#))
  - Antarctic ice shelf boundary shapefiles ([Mouginot et al., 2017](#))
  - Imagery data from LIMA ([Bindschadler et al., 2008](#))
- 2) Pre-process the data
  - convert the Bedmap2 .tif files into compressed .zarr files
  - resample the grid from 1 km resolution to 1.5 km
  - extract the portion of the grids around the Saunders Coast region
  - calculate the water column thickness ([surface - ice thickness] - bed)
  - mask the grid outside of the floating ice shelves
- 3) Create a map
  - plot a basemap of imagery
  - plot water column thickness data
  - add a colorbar histogram to show the data distribution
  - add features like a scale bar, inset map, and a title

```
# import modules
from polartoolkit import fetch, maps, regions, utils

# define a geographic region
region = regions.saunders_coast

# download and pre-process bedmap2 data
water_thickness = fetch.bedmap2(
    layer="water_thickness",
    region=region,
    spacing=1500,
```

```

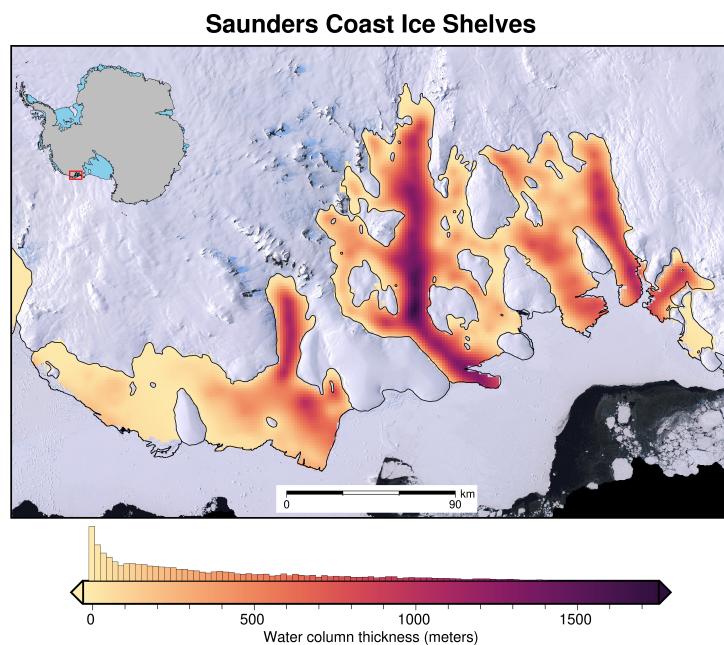
        )

# mask areas outside of ice shelves
water_thickness = utils.mask_from_shp(
    fetch.antarctic_boundaries(version="IceShelf"),
    xr_grid=water_thickness,
    masked=True,
    invert=False,
    hemisphere="south",
)

# plot map and set options
fig = maps.plot_grd(
    water_thickness,
    cmap="matter",
    title="Saunders Coast Ice Shelves",
    cbar_label="Water column thickness (meters)",
    imagery_basemap=True,
    coast=True,
    inset=True,
    scalebar=True,
    hist=True,
    hemisphere="south",
)

# display figure
fig.show()

```



**Figure 1:** Example map output from above code implemented in PolarToolkit. Water column thickness (Fretwell et al., 2013) beneath the ice shelves of Antarctica's Saunders Coast. Inset map shows figure location. Grounding line and coastlines shown by black line (Depoorter et al., 2013). Background imagery from LIMA (Bindschadler et al., 2008). Colorbar histogram shows data distribution.

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