Dependence of Pine Island Glacier Ice Shelf Basal Melt Rates on Subgrid-Scale Parameterizations of Mixing

C21D-1491

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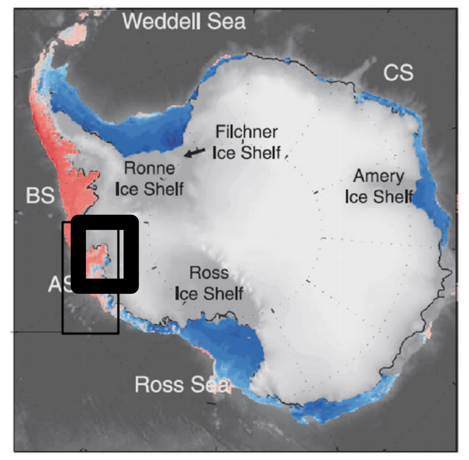
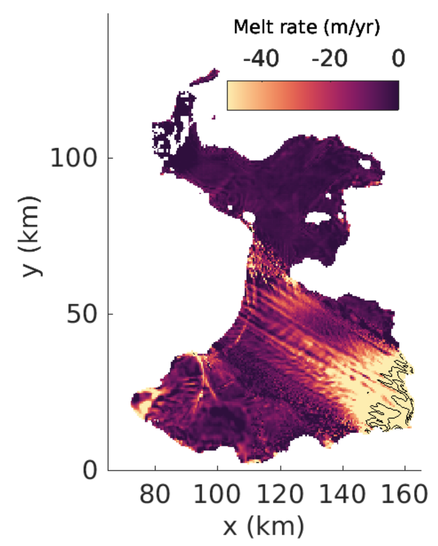
Introduction



The Pine Island Ice Shelf is melting rapidly from beneath due to the circulation of relatively warm water onto the continental shelf. Determining how the melt rate changes due to changing ocean conditions requires a detailed understanding of the mechanisms of heat transfer beneath the ice shelf.

Question

How well can we tune the melt rate in a thermodynamically coupled ocean—ice shelf model to match observationally inferred melt rates?



Observed Pine Island Ice Shelf Melt Rate (Shean et al., 2018, *Cryosphere Discuss.)*

Previous studies have shown that the primary controls on melt rate are:

1) Depth and slope of ice shelf base; presence of channels
2) Bathymetry in cavity
3) Heat content of ocean (thermocline depth, water mass properties)
4) Formulation of buoyancy exchange at the ice/ocean interface

Here we also consider

5) The role of tracer diffusion due to numerical diffusion and mixed layer formulation.

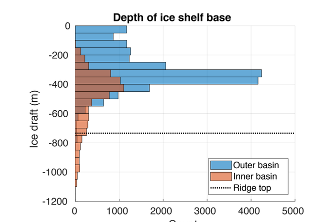
Ocean Model Description

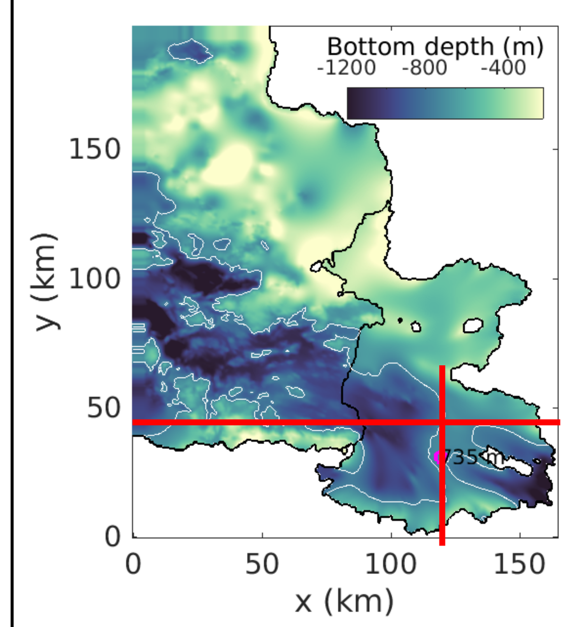
- ROMS with ice shelf
- Ice shelf interacts thermodynamically with ocean (3-equation formulation); no other surface forcing
- 500 m horizontal grid spacing; 24 vertical levels
- Open boundaries allow disturbances to pass out of domain but maintain stratification with nudging

Reference simulation
- Third-order tracer advection
- KPP vertical mixing, quadratic drag (cd=2.5e-3), Laplacian horizontal viscosity (A_H=15 m²/s)

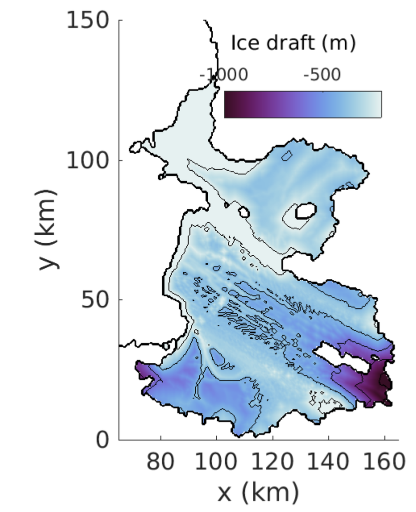
Experiments
- MPDATA tracer advection
- Mellor-Yamada Level 2.5 mixed layer
- Varying explicit diffusion

Model Domain



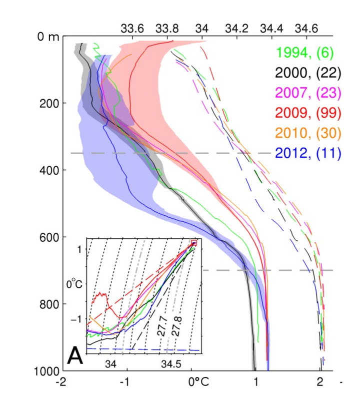


Bathymetry in model domain IBCSO data on continental shelf were blended with sub-ice shelf data (B. Smith, pers. comm.).

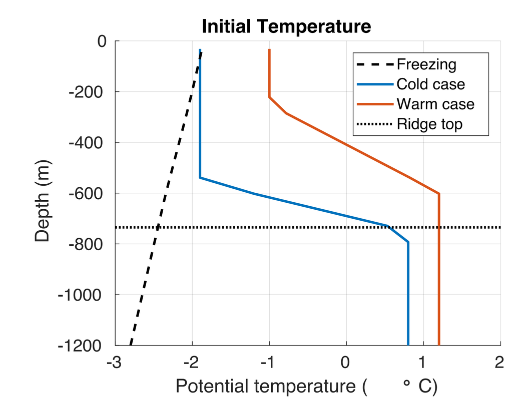


Ice draft for year 2013 derived from WorldView DEMs (Shean et al., 2018 *Cryosphere Discuss.*) .

Hydrography -- Initial Conditions

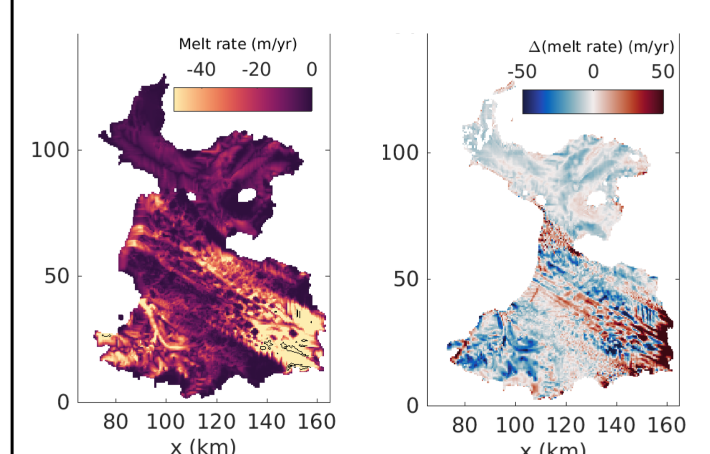


Ensemble of observed temperature and salinity profiles (Dutrieux et al, 2014, *Science*).

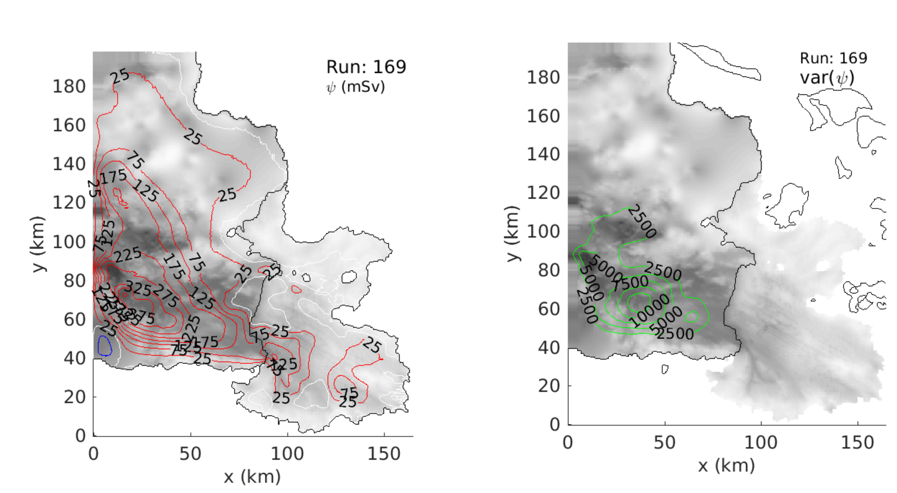


Idealized temperature profiles used in model runs represent extremes. Linear T-S relations are assumed.

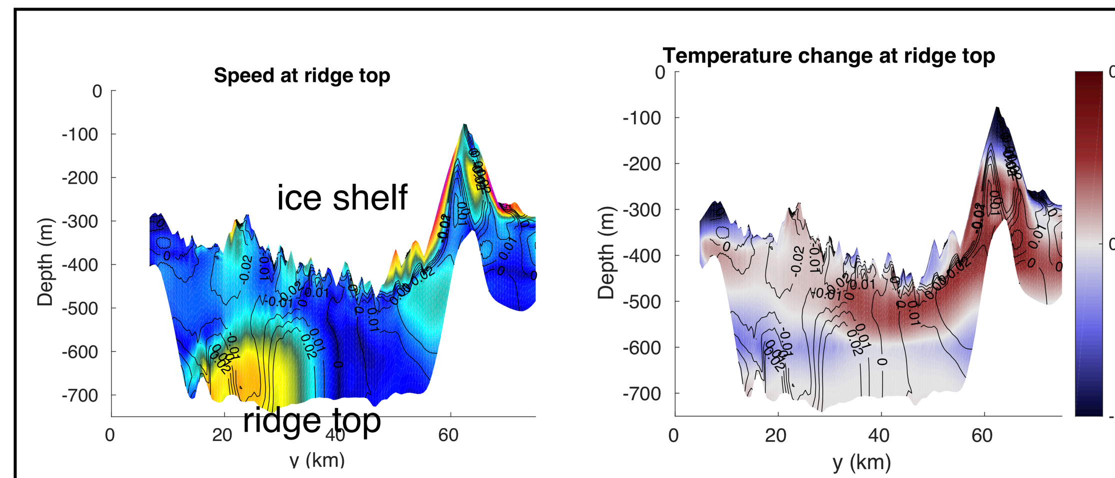
Simulated circulation and melt



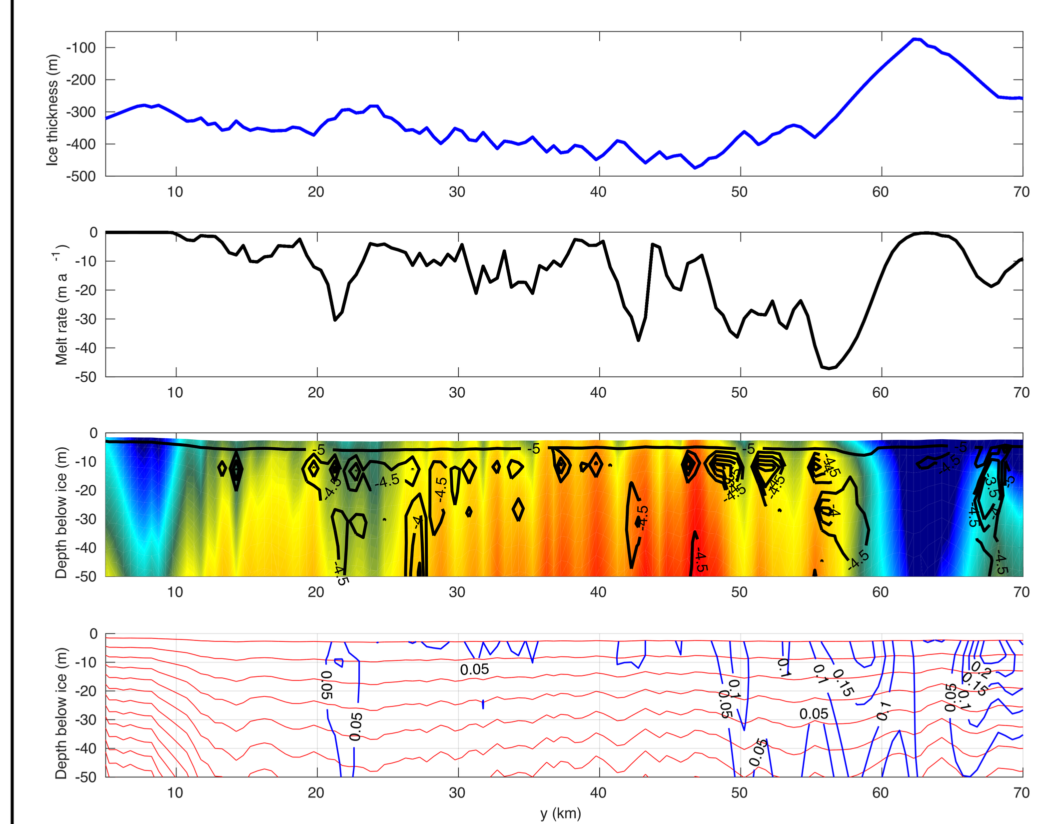
Reference model simulated melt rate (left) and difference from observed (right). Largest discrepancy is near grounding line.



Mean (left) and variance (right) of barotropic stream function. Ridge creates a potential vorticity barrier that isolates barotropic circulation in back cavity.



Flow over the ridge top is baroclinc. A broad, ~200 m thick layer near the bottom flows into the inner cavity at up to 5 cm/s and a ~20 m thick layer beneath the ice flows outward, especially along the sides of channels, at speeds up to 20 cm/s. Zoom of the basal boundary layer shown below..

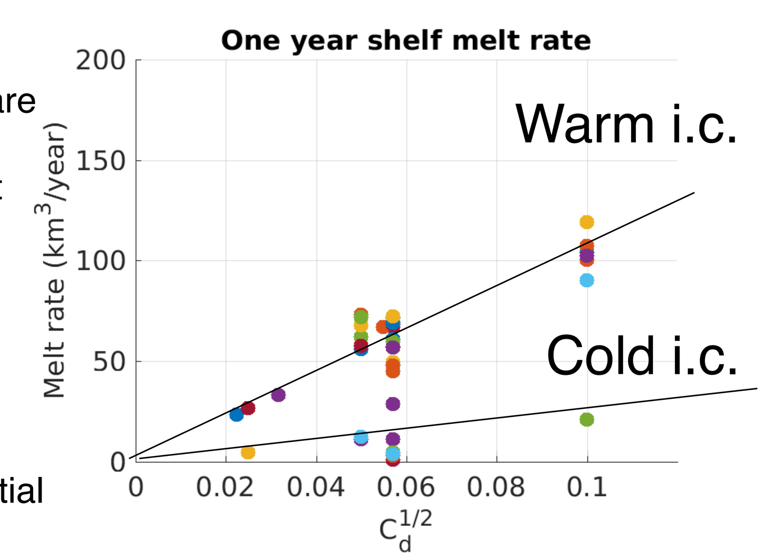


Basal l boundary layer above ridge. (a) depth of ice base (b) melt rate (c) temperature with log10(Akt) contours (d) speed (blue contours) and layer depths (red contours). Vertical resolution of the boundary layer is better than 10 m.

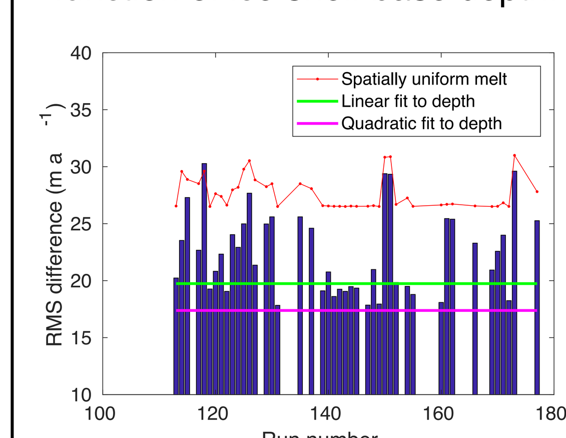
Parameter dependence of melt rate

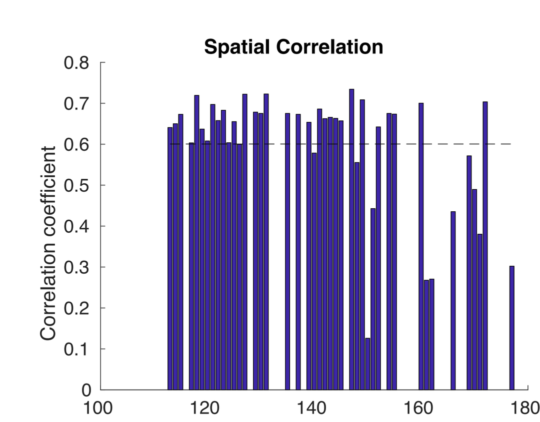
The depth of the thermocline and the basal drag coefficient are the primary controls on spatially averaged melt rate.

Varying background diffusivity, mixed layer formulation, and tracer advection scheme had some effect on the spatial pattern of melt.

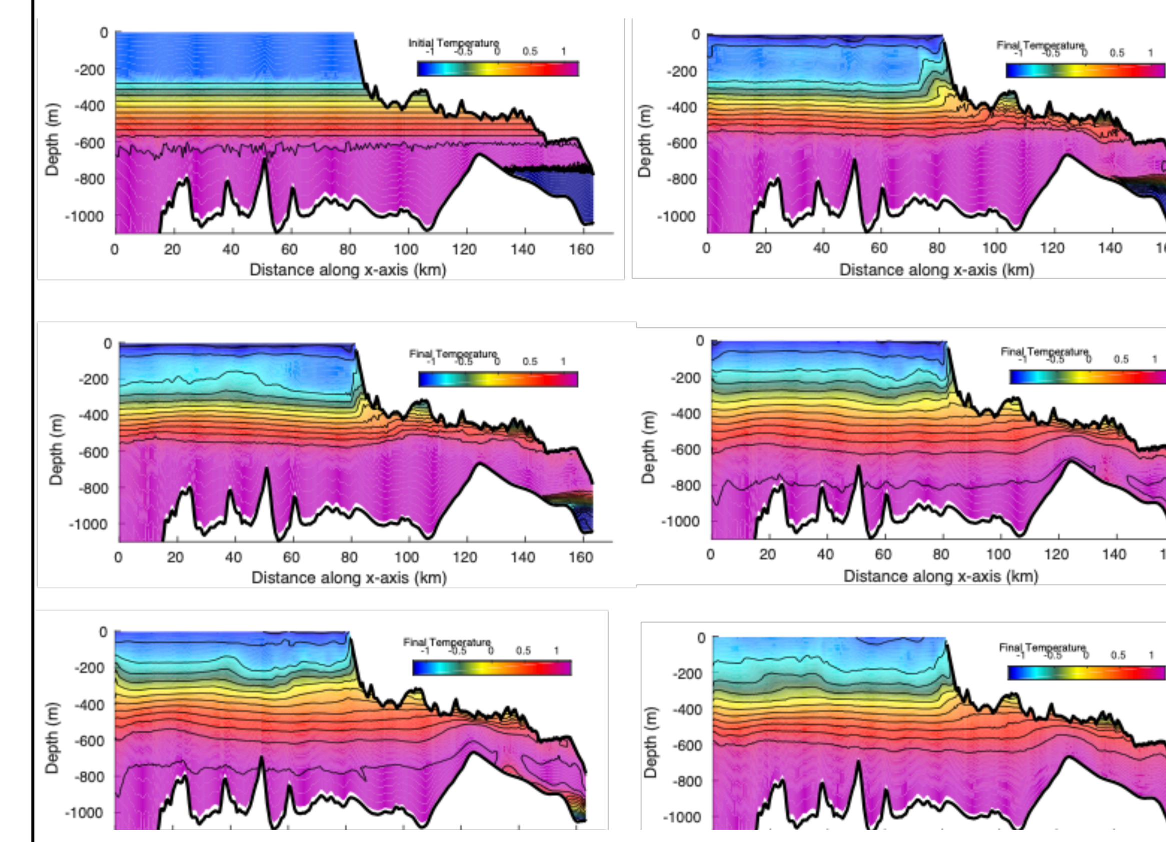


Model simulations produce a melt pattern that is a better r.m.s. fit to observations than assuming a spatially constant value. The best simulations approach the error of an empirical fit that is a quadratic function of ice shelf base depth.



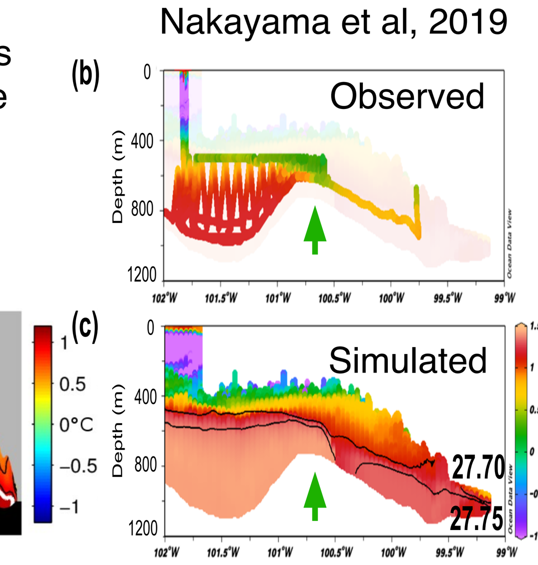


Simulations with similar melt patterns can have notably different stratification due to the differences in tracer diffusion. Observations of hydrography beneath the ice shelf, as done by Autosub, are helpful in selecting the best model configuration

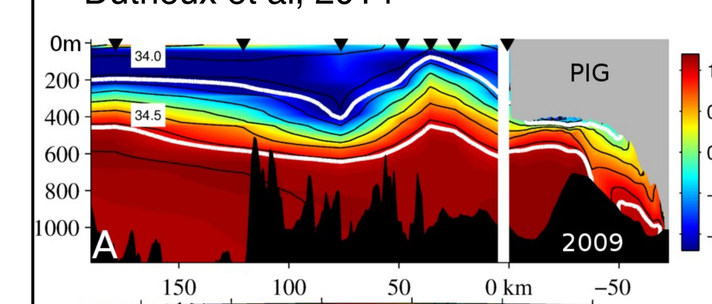


Compared with previous simulations (below), ours lacks melt water in the deepest reaches of the cavity.

Nakayama et al, 2019



Dutrieux et al, 2014



Conclusions

- Choice of drag coefficient and thermocline depth have dominant influence on spatially averaged melt rate.
- Varying other model parameters (tracer advection scheme, turbulence parameterization, background diffusivity) have comparatively little effect.
- Depth and slope of ice shelf base control spatial pattern of melt. Limitations on terrain-following vertical coordinate makes it difficult to represent melt in critical region near grounding line.
- High resolution basal topography has channels that guide outflow. Small scale features are reflected in basal melt.
- Observed melt rates alone are not sufficient to constrain model choices. Additional observations, such as hydrographic observations beneath the shelf, are necessary to select the best fit model.

Acknowledgements

Work supported by National Science Foundations grants to Earth and Space Research and University of Washington. Computations used the Extreme Science and Engineering Discovery Environment (XSEDE), which is supported by National Science Foundation grant number ACI-1548562.

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