Earth Surf. Dynam. Discuss., https://doi.org/10.5194/esurf-2018-24
Manuscript under review for journal Earth Surf. Dynam.
Discussion started: 22 March 2018

Google Earth Engine Digitisation Tool (GEEDiT), and Margin change Quantification Tool (MaQiT) – simple tools for the rapid mapping and quantification of changing Earth surface margins

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Abstract

The visualisation and exploration of satellite imagery archives coupled with the quantification of margin/boundary changes are frequently used within earth surface sciences as key indicators of the environmental processes and drivers acting within a system. However, the large scale rapid visualisation and analysis of this imagery is often impractical due to factors such as computer processing power, software availability, internet connection speed, and user expertise in remote sensing. Here are described two separate tools that together can be used to process and visualise the full Landsat 4-8 and Sentinel 1-2 satellite records in seconds, enabling efficient mapping (through manual digitisation) and automated quantification of margin changes. These tools are highly accessible for users from a range of remote sensing expertise, with minimal computational, licensing and knowledge-based barriers to access. The Google Earth Engine Digitisation Tool (GEEDiT) allows users to define a point anywhere on the planet and access all Landsat 4-8/Sentinel 1-2 imagery at that location, filtered for user defined time frames, maximum acceptable cloud cover extent, and options of predefined or custom image band combinations via a simple Graphical User Interface (GUI). GEEDiT also allows georeferenced vectors to be easily and rapidly mapped from each image with image metadata and user notes automatically appended to each vector. This data can then be exported to a user's Google Drive for subsequent analysis. The Margin change Quantification Tool (MaQiT) is complimentary to GEEDiT, allowing the rapid quantification of these margin changes utilising two well-established methods that have previously been used to measure glacier margin change and two new methods via a similarly simple GUI. MaQiT is also suitable for the (re-)analysis of existing datasets not generated by GEEDiT. Although MaQiT has been developed with the aim of quantifying tidewater glacier terminus change, the tool can be applied to other margin changes within earth surface science where margin/boundary change through time is of interest (e.g. coastal and vegetation extent change). It is hoped that these tools will allow a wide range of researchers and

students across the geosciences to have access to, efficiently map and analyse volumes of data that may have previously proven prohibitive.

1. Introduction

Satellite data provide an invaluable record of spatial and temporal change on the Earth's surface. However, the volume and scale of data available for analysis (coupled with computational, software licensing, data storage, internet connectivity, and knowledge based barriers to entry) mean that users may require a significant amount of time to go from downloading an image to finalising its analysis. This can be exemplified in the study of tidewater glacier calving margins where a large volume of remote sensing imagery exists, though spatially large scale studies are often required to focus on a number of census timeframes (e.g. Cook et al., 2005; Moon and Joughin, 2008; Carr et al., 2017), while detailed studies often focus on a relatively small number of sites (e.g. Bevan et al., 2012; Motyka et al., 2017).

The availability of satellite imagery via application programming interfaces (APIs) and increasingly via platforms such as Google Earth Engine (Gorelick et al., 2017), Sentinel Hub's Earth Observation Explorer (Sinergise, 2018), and Planet (Planet Labs Inc., 2018) mean that these data are becoming increasingly accessible. However, the ability of users to access these data at such a large scale is currently limited by the requirement for either knowledge of scripting and/or downloading, storage and processing of substantial volumes of data. Even where users are comfortable with such requirements, images may still prove time consuming to effectively visualise, and finally analyse, thus taking further time.

The identification of temporally evolving margins/boundaries digitised from this imagery is also frequently used across earth surface sciences to provide key temporal and/or spatial insight into the system of interest (e.g. Kuenzer et al., 2014; Roelfsema et al., 2013; Fitzpatrick et al., 2014; Lynch and Barr, 2016). Although different geoscientific problems will have different temporal and spatial data coverage requirements, a user's ability to map these boundaries accurately will depend on the effective visualisation of imagery, while generating temporally detailed datasets is dependent on achieving this efficiently and consistently for a large number of images. However, even if a substantial volume of observational data can be generated, a subsequent issue is the ability to rapidly and accurately quantify changes in the spatial data that are produced.

This study presents two simple-to-use tools that when used together aims to significantly improve the efficiency of visualising and exploring satellite imagery, while also allowing the mapping and quantification margin changes directly from them. The first is the Google Earth Engine Digitisation Tool (GEEDiT), which allows the rapid visualisation, mapping and export of digitised margins without the need to download imagery to the user's computer. It is also possible to use GEEDiT to map multiple features directly from an individual image, and append notes to individual margins and images. The second is the Margin change Quantification Tool (MaQiT) that allows the rapid quantification of these digitised margin changes, utilising two existing methods and two new methods that have commonly been used in the quantification of tidewater glacier margin change (Lea et al., 2014). Although initially developed for glaciological applications, each of these quantification methods are likely to have applications in the quantification of margin change in other areas of earth surface sciences such as coastal change, lake level evolution, and vegetation and urban extent change amongst others.

2.1 Google Earth Engine Digitisation Tool - GEEDiT

GEEDiT is written in JavaScript within Google Earth Engine's (GEE) API (Gorelick et al., 2017). The tool is designed to allow satellite imagery from Landsat 4-8 and Sentinel 1-2 to be visualised rapidly within a standard web-browser, also allowing the digitisation and export of polyline vector data in GeoJSON (Georeferenced JavaScript Object Notation format), or KML/KMZ (Keyhole Markup Language/Keyhole Markup Zipped format compatible with Google Earth) formats. GEE does not currently support the export of data in shapefile format, though a tool is included within MaQiT to both merge and convert GeoJSON files to a single shapefile (see section 3). This means that data digitised during multiple GEEDiT sessions can be merged and/or converted for use either in MaQiT or a traditional Geographic Information System (GIS) platform. The tool has been tested using Google Chrome, though should also function in other widely used browsers such as Mozilla Firefox and Safari.

Access to GEE for research, education and non-profit use is free of charge, though potential users are required to register for access (https://signup.earthengine.google.com/). The only other requirement is access to Google Drive (included as part of signing up to a Gmail email address), which is also free. The tool can be run and used by following the steps below (Figure 1):

1. Click on a link that provides access to the shared code, or copy and paste the shared code into the central code editor panel. This should be saved to the scripts folder in the left panel using the 'Save' button above the code editor panel. This step only needs to be done the first time GEEDiT is used.
2. If the program does not automatically start, click 'Run' located above where the script can be viewed in the code editor panel. Once this has been done the screen divider can be

moved to allow the image of the Earth to occupy the majority of the screen. The tool's welcome panel should have appeared. Click 'New Project'.

3. The tool asks the user to navigate to an area of interest (i.e. where the data should be visualised for) and click once to identify the location. Once this is done, the user should click 'Continue' in the bottom right corner.
4. The name of the project can now be entered. If this field is left empty the project will be called 'Undefined'. The project name forms the first part of the output filename. The output file format should also be selected on this panel. If data are to be used subsequently in MaQiT or GIS software, it is recommended that data are output as GeoJSON format (this is the default format if none is selected) for subsequent conversion to shapefile format using the tool included in MaQiT (see step 9). Click 'OK'.
5. The central panel that appears allows the user to filter the images that will be included by date, month, and maximum acceptable cloud cover. If all fields are left unaltered, the default values indicated are used. The left hand panel determines how the images will be visualised. There are 'natural' (i.e. true colour), 'false colour' and 'custom' options (Table 1), and the option to turn on/off pansharpening for Landsat 7 and 8 (i.e. merging lower resolution multi-spectral bands with a higher resolution panchromatic (band 8) to increase image resolution to 15 m). If the 'custom' option is selected the bands of interest should be entered into the relevant text boxes. If using a custom band combination it is strongly recommended to analyse imagery from one satellite at a time. This is due to the wavelengths of different satellite band numbers not always matching (Table 2). The satellite platforms of interest can be selected using tickboxes on the right hand panel. To minimise the potential of significant data loss due to internet connection failure, it is possible to manually define how often (i.e. after how many images) data are exported (see step 8). It is strongly recommended that as soon as each export task is set up that this is run to download the data to the user's Google Drive (see step 8). Tasks that have not been run before the program is restarted are automatically discarded by GEE. Once the desired options have been selected from all 3 panels, click 'OK' at the bottom of the middle panel.
6. The earliest image from the oldest satellite is visualised first, and the browser automatically zooms in so that the image occupies the screen centred on the chosen point of interest. The satellite platform, date of image and image number are shown in the top right panel. Each image can be explored by dragging/scrolling. The next image can be visualised by clicking the 'Continue to next image' button in the bottom right of the screen.

7. Single clicks on the map will begin the digitisation of a margin. Each single click will record a vertex location. The lines marking where the margin has been digitised may be lagged appearing on the screen, however the locations of all single clicks are recorded by the tool near-instantaneously.
    a. If a mistake on a single vertex is made, this can be deleted using the button in the top left of the screen, or the entire margin deleted by clicking 'Re-draw margin'.
    b. If multiple margins need to be digitised on a single image, click 'Draw another margin' in the top left panel once digitisation of the initial margin is complete. Margins that have already been digitised for that image will appear in a different colour. Note that the quantification tools in MaQiT will only work where one margin per image has been digitised.
    c. Where it is relevant to record whether the margin is unclear for a given image the 'Margin Unclear' checkbox can be selected – where checked, this will record a value of 1 in the relevant metadata field, but will otherwise be recorded as 0. If the margin is unclear and no line is digitised a small line from the centre of the field of view is constructed to allow the metadata value to be recorded.
    d. It is possible to append notes to the metadata of individual margins using the text box in the top left panel. It is also possible to use this to make notes on individual images without digitising a margin. In the case of the latter, the notes are appended to a small line automatically generated in the centre of the field of view.
    e. If no margin, or less than 2 points are digitised, then no margin is recorded and information from that image will not appear in the exported data. To log analysis as being finished for an image click 'Continue to next image'. To digitise another feature on the same image click 'Draw another margin'. Previously digitised margins on that date will appear on the screen in a different colour (note that MaQiT will only quantify changes for individual features (i.e. changes occurring for one glacier margin). Users who wish to use data from GEEDiT in MaQiT should therefore digitise a maximum of one margin per image).
8. Once digitisation of margins from all images is finished, data can be exported using the 'Export Data' button in the bottom right of the screen. This will create a 'Task' which can be viewed in the Tasks tab of the top right panel next to the code editor (resize the horizontal screen divider to view this if necessary). To download the data to Google Drive click the 'Run' button next to the relevant task in the right hand panel. Make sure that the desired file format is selected in the dialog box that appears. The default filename is the project name

with the user defined start date, followed by the final date where a margin has been digitised for in the format *ProjectName_YYYY-MM-DD_YYYY-MM-DD*. Note that until this step has been taken that the data have not been saved, and will be lost if the browser window is closed or refreshed, or if the program is restarted. The warning screen that appears after the 'Export Data' button is clicked highlights this. The format of the output file allows users to save work regularly and easily identify how much of the record has been analysed. While GEE does not allow data to be downloaded directly to the user's hard drive, this can be done once the data have been saved to the user's Google Drive.

9. To convert and/or merge multiple GEEDiT outputs in GeoJSON format to shapefile format open MaQiT (see section 3) and click the 'Merge/Convert Tool' button. Dialog boxes will appear asking which files to merge/convert to a single shapefile, before a second dialog box will ask to define the name of the output shapefile.

2.2 Image visualisation

GEEDiT can visualise imagery from optical imaging platforms as either natural (true colour), false colour or custom band combinations. Sentinel-1 synthetic aperture radar (SAR) data can also be visualised as grayscale images (Table 1). SAR data exist in either single or dual band polarisation bands, though not every band is collected for every scene. To maximise the temporal and spatial coverage for the tool, GEEDiT will visualise whichever single polarisation band is available (either horizontal transmit/horizontal receive [HH], or vertical transmit/vertical receive [VV]) for both ascending and descending orbits for a particular time and location. The polarisation and type of orbit (ascending/descending) of each SAR image is displayed in the top right panel alongside the satellite name, date and image number/total number of images available.

Note that a feature's location for Sentinel 1 imagery in areas that have undergone significant topographic change (relative to the digital elevation model used for terrain correction (SRTM 30 for areas <60° latitude, otherwise ASTER DEM)) can be significantly impacted by whether the image was acquired during an ascending or descending orbit (see Section 4). Care should therefore be taken in using Sentinel 1 data in such scenarios (e.g. where significant surface thinning of a glacier/ice sheet has occurred).

A summary of the default parameters used to visualise both the optical and SAR imagery is given in Table 2. Further information regarding each satellite image collection can be obtained by searching for it in the GEE search bar at the top of the screen.

2.3 Output of margin/boundary data

Vector data are output by GEEDiT in decimal degrees format so as to be easily read by GIS software and/or subsequently converted to different spatial projections. Key metadata that link each margin to information about the image it has digitised from are appended to each digitised line (Table 3). This includes each image's unique path identifier, meaning that results generated by GEEDiT are directly traceable back to its original image. If it is anticipated that the data digitised in GEEDiT will be analysed subsequently in a different GIS environment, it is recommended that data are output as GeoJSON files, since these can be merged/converted to shapefile format using. Note that kml/kmz files do not always allow metadata to be retained when they are imported into standard GIS software packages such as ArcGIS and QGIS using 'out of the box' tools. Exporting data in kml/kmz formats therefore may make subsequent analysis problematic.

3. Margin change Quantification Tool – MaQiT

MaQiT has been produced to rapidly quantify marginal change for use in subsequent analysis (outputs provided as Excel/OpenOffice compatible csv spreadsheets and as initial plots generated by the tool), and also convert and merge single/multiple GeoJSON/shapefile files into a single shapefile. Although MaQiT uses methods that have been developed for the quantification of tidewater glacier margin change (e.g. Lea et al., 2014), they will be transferable to tracking margin changes in other environments. Each quantification method has its own benefits and pitfalls, meaning that appropriate method selection should be based primarily on the research question being asked.

3.1 Installing/running MaQiT

Although MaQiT has been written in Matlab®, its code has been compiled into a standalone application (installers available for Windows and Mac) meaning that it can be installed and run by users without a Matlab® license and free of any charges. The only pre-requisite for this is to download the free software, Matlab® Runtime, though this should be prompted for automatically once the installer is opened.

For users with a Matlab® license, MaQiT can be run by copying all the scripts to a single directory and running the MaQiT.m script. This will open MaQiT's graphical user interface (GUI), allowing it to be used in a similar manner to the standalone application (Figure 2). The methods used by MaQiT can also be run programmatically as Matlab® functions. Where multiple datasets from large numbers of sites exist, this provides the potential for large scale rapid analysis. The results generated after the analysis of each location can be accessed via a data structure named *Results* in the Matlab® workspace, or be written to a csv spreadsheet similar to that produced by the GUI. MaQiT also makes use of publically submitted functions obtained from the Mathworks File Exchange

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(Palacios, 2006; D'Errico, 2012a; 2012b; 2013; Dugge, 2015). Copies of these functions are compiled into the standalone version of MaQiT, and are included in the folder that will be appended to this publication.

3.2 MaQiT inputs

At a minimum the tool requires two shapefiles for analysis to be undertaken, though some methods require extra parameters to be defined by the user (see Sect. 3.3). The first shapefile should contain every margin location. The fields should include the compulsory fields/information formatted in the manner indicated shown in Table 4. Data obtained via GEEDiT are guaranteed to be compatible with MaQiT. Data digitised by other means can be read by MaQiT if it contains the correctly formatted compulsory fields/information, though MaQiT will ignore any fields that are not listed in Table 4.

The second input required is a centreline/transect that intersects with each margin/boundary. This should be digitised from an 'upstream' to 'downstream' (or for a coastal change example, landward to seaward) direction to ensure that negative values provided by the methods correspond to retreat, while positive values link to advance. If the centreline does not intersect with a boundary it may result in the analysis failing. It is possible to identify the vector that causes the analysis to fail by viewing the Windows console (automatically opens with the Windows standalone version), the MaQiT_log file (for Mac/Linux installations) or the Matlab console (for those with a Matlab license).

MaQiT will also accept vector information given in Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) format and automatically convert to UTM where data are given in decimal degrees to allow measurements of change to be given in meters.

3.2.1 Merging/converting files with MaQiT

It would be suitable to use the 'Merge/Convert Tool' in MaQiT under two scenarios:

1. One (or more) GeoJSON files exported from GEEDiT need to be converted and/or merged into a single shapefile.
2. Pre-existing shapefiles need to be merged into a single shapefile. The pre-existing shapefiles should be polylines and takes the first 10 characters of its filename as the date of the observation (i.e. *YYYY_MM_DD*).

In each case this can be easily done by opening MaQiT and clicking the 'Merge/Convert Tool' button in the bottom left of the window. This should create a single shapefile suitable for use in MaQiT while also retaining all of the original shapefiles/GeoJSON files.

3.3 Methods of quantifying margin/boundary changes in MaQiT

Four different methods of quantifying margin changes are included in MaQiT, two of which are approaches that are used in the tracking of tidewater glacier terminus change (e.g. Cook et al., 2005; Lea et al., 2014), while two are new methods designed for the same purpose, though with potential wider applications.

3.3.1 Centreline method

This is the simplest approach to tracking marginal change, measuring the linear distance along a centreline between two boundaries (e.g. Cook et al., 2005; VanLooy and Forster, 2008; Figure **3a**). This approach provides a one-dimensional measure of change that does not account for the behaviour of the entire margin; only the point of intersection between the centreline and the margin (Lea et al., 2014). While this method is simple, the method is best suited to scenarios/research questions where it can be assumed that the margin is uniformly advancing/retreat, or the area of the margin that is of interest is narrow (i.e. a few pixels across). If either of these assumptions are not valid, or a higher level of detail is required, then an alternative method of tracking change would be more suitable.

3.3.2 Curvilinear Box Method

This method provides a linear measure of margin advance/retreat by defining a box of fixed width spanning the centreline that intersects with the margin, before dividing the area of this box by its width (Lea et al., 2014; Figure **3b**). The user is required to define the box width. The result provides the one dimensional distance from the start of a centreline to the mean location of the part of the margin that intersects with the box. The method is an extension of the box method used by Moon and Joughin (2008) though has the advantage that the defined box does not need to be rectilinear (i.e. it allows the box to follow potentially non-linear topographic features such as fjords/valleys).

If the defined box width is wider than the margin itself/one or more edges of the box do not intersect with the margin, the box will be 'closed' by lines that take the shortest distance from the start/end points of the margin to the box edge. If this scenario is a possibility (i.e. if the box width is greater than that of the margin width), it is important that the centreline used extends upstream and downstream of the margins for a greater distance than the shortest path between the centreline and the start/end points of any of the digitised margins (i.e. the centreline should extend up/downstream for >>half of the width of the longest margin). Failure to do this may result in errors in the geometry of the boxes used to obtain measurements. This can be checked visually using the 'Plot output' option in MaQiT, which shows the geometries of each box that is used to quantify margin change. If errors of this nature do occur, it is recommended that the user re-draws the centreline, extending the start point further up/downstream.

Although this method has the potential to account for a higher proportion of the margin than the centreline method, it will not account for the entire margin. It is therefore suitable to apply if the user is interested in obtaining an averaged measure of change for a particular section of the margin.

3.3.3 Variable Box Method

This method is similar to the curvilinear box method, though instead of using a fixed box width it uses the full width of the margin (Figure **3c**). The width of each box is defined as the total distance between the start and end nodes of the margin. This allows a one dimensional distance of change to be determined that includes the full extent of the digitised margin. Similar caveats apply to this method as the curvilinear box method.

To ensure the accuracy of results given by this method, it is important that the start/end points of each margin are at physically meaningful locations. To ensure the comparability of results this is especially important where it is possible that the margin will have occupied a given location more than once. An example of this would be a tidewater glacier, with physically meaningful start/end points being the two points at which the glacier margin, sea and land meet (i.e. the distance between the start and end points of the margin would give an accurate measurement of glacier width). If only part of the ice front was digitised then the method would give an inaccurate result that may not be comparable to subsequent observations. Where the method is applied using arbitrarily/semi-arbitrarily defined start/end points then the variable box method may over/under predict extent depending on how much of, and what parts of the margin have or have not been digitised.

3.3.4 Multi-centreline method

This method extends the centreline method to include multiple centrelines that span the width of a margin. This results in many one-dimensional measures of change, thus allowing the spatial variability of margin advance/retreat to be quantified (Figure **3d**). MaQiT visualises the distance changes that occur as colour change on an *xy* plot (see Section 4). Where the process of interest may occur over timescales longer than the intervals between observations, it is also possible to define the temporal ‘window’ over which margin changes will be quantified. For example, if a margin observation exists every 8 days, but the research question requires comparison of observations made between every 30 to 40 days apart, this can optionally be defined and MaQiT will automatically filter the observations.

3.4 Viewing results from MaQiT

The results generated by MaQiT for each method can be visualised as a series of plots that are automatically generated by the tool. Due to the nature of each method, the plots used to visualise the results vary between methods (i.e. the centreline method does not include a plot to check box geometry as it does not require using a box). For the centreline, and curvilinear and variable box methods there are either three or four plots shown (e.g. Figures **S1-4**). The first plot shows all the margins to allow the user to check that they have been read in correctly. The second plot is only included for the curvilinear and variable box methods as it allows the user to check that the box geometries have been constructed correctly. The third plot shows a time series of distance change of the margin. The multi-centreline method provides a different output, showing results as a series of 4 rows of plots that show (1) marginal change including every available observation; (2) marginal change using the defined temporal window (if a temporal window is not defined this plot will be identical to the first plot); (3) absolute distance change between observations from one margin to the next observation; and (4) rate of margin change between observations (Figure **S4**). The left column of plots shows changes occurring for the entire margin width, while the right column shows for reference the one dimensional results that would otherwise be generated by the centreline method.

It is strongly recommended for all methods that users view results generated by MaQiT as a quality control measure of both the user's data and the successful execution of the analysis.

Users with a standalone MaQiT installation are able to output results to a csv file for subsequent analysis. Values output include year, month, date, serial date (i.e. number of days since January 0th 0000 AD), margin position on flowline, margin position relative to most retreated, margin change compared to previous observation, rate of change from previous observation, margin width, and (for box methods only) box widths and box area. Users with a Matlab® license are able to interrogate and subsequently analyse output via the *Results* data structure that is generated and located in the workspace and/or export data to a csv file. Due to the nature of the data generated by the multi-centreline method (i.e. xyz data that are problematic to systematically write to a csv file), MaQiT standalone installation users are not able to write results from this method.

4. Case study – Margin change at Breiðamerkurjökull, Iceland

Breiðamerkurjökull, SE Iceland (64.11° N 16.22° W) is an outlet glacier of the Vatnajökull ice cap that drains into the tidal lagoon, Jökulsárlón (Figure **4**). The calving margin of the glacier was digitised at monthly intervals (where possible) for each of Landsat 8, Sentinel 2, and Sentinel 1 (ascending and descending orbits) for January 2014 to January 2018. This allows a broad intercomparison of any systematic biases that may exist between these platforms in an area that has undergone significant elevation change relative to the DEM used for terrain correction of the imagery (Bjornsson et al., 2001). A total of 587 images were viewed during digitisation, with 133 ice fronts digitised in total. The summary statistics of the digitised margins are given in Table **5**. Visualisation and digitisation of the margins were undertaken in four sessions, taking a total time of 2 hours, 3 minutes. Note that the level of detail users should aim to digitise margins at will be dependent on their research question. An approximate metric for the level of detail obtained for a margin can be obtained by dividing the total length of the margin by the number of points digitise it (e.g. Table **5**).

Once digitisation of the ice margins was complete, MaQiT was used to convert and merge the GeoJSON files generated by GEEDiT to a single shapefile.

It should be emphasised that the method of margin change quantification that should be used for this type of data is heavily dependent on the research question that the user is seeking to address. The analysis undertaken here is only to provide a demonstration of the methods available in MaQiT.

4.1 Results of case study

4.1.1 Intercomparison of results from different satellites

The curvilinear box method (width = 2000 m) was used to illustrate if any systematic differences exist between margins digitised from different satellites (Figure **5**). Results show that while similar patterns and magnitudes of change are given for each satellite, margins digitised from Sentinel 1 imagery show clear under and over-estimation of margin extent (relative to Sentinel 2 and Landsat 8 imagery) for descending and ascending orbits respectively. One to one matches in results are not expected as image acquisitions for the different satellites did not always fall on the same day, while the margin of Breiðamerkurjökull is known to flow rapidly (>5 m d^{-1}; Voytenko et al., 2015), meaning that the margin has the potential to be highly dynamic over short timescales (cf. Benn et al., 2017).

Though results from Sentinel 2 and Landsat 8 are broadly comparable, Figure **5** illustrates that for Sentinel 1 imagery there can be significant mismatch in areas where significant elevation change has occurred (relative to the DEM used for initial terrain correction). In environments where considerable elevation change has not occurred the mismatch should be less, though margins from ascending and descending orbits (automatically appended by GEEDiT to margin metadata) should still be checked for systematic biases.

These mismatches shown in these results demonstrate that considerable care should be taken in combining observations from Landsat/Sentinel 2 imagery with Sentinel 1 imagery.

4.2 Intercomparison of methods for quantifying margin change

Observations of margin change at Breiðamerkurjökull obtained from Landsat 8 are used to demonstrate the different methods of margin change quantification included in MaQiT.

4.2.1 One-dimensional measures of margin change

The centreline, curvilinear box, and variable box methods provide one-dimensional measures of margin change (i.e. how far advanced/retreated a margin is relative to the distance along a centreline). Figure **6** shows that each of the methods record similar overall patterns of change (i.e. retreat), though at times diverge from each other depending on method/parameter choice. In particular, the centreline method displays a high degree of variability (e.g. 2015-18) as it reflects margin change in an extremely localised area. This is in contrast to the other methods that provide results that are more representative of the margin as a whole. It should also be noted that while each method generally agrees on the sign of margin change (i.e. advance or retreat) this is not always the case. In general, methods that account for larger proportions of the margin (i.e. the variable box and curvilinear box method [width = 2000 m]) are more likely to disagree with methods that account for less of the margin (i.e. centreline and curvilinear box methods [width = 1000 m]). This highlights the importance of the need to carefully select method/parameter choice with respect to the research question that is being addressed.

4.2.2 Multi-centreline method

The multi-centreline method provides a two-dimensional representation of margin change, highlighting regions of the margin that are more susceptible to advance/retreat, in addition to the timing and magnitude of this. It also provides a means of visualising two dimensional change as a time series rather than relying on maps of margin change that may otherwise be difficult to interpret in a meaningful way (e.g. Figure **7a**). For the case study observations were obtained at approximately monthly intervals, though the method has been applied so as to highlight changes over seasonal timescales (60 to 120 days). Results show that the centre of the margin is consistently the most retreated (Figure **7bi, ii**), and that there is little seasonal consistency across the entire margin as to whether it advances/retreats, and at what rate (Figure **7biii, iv**).

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Manuscript under review for journal Earth Surf. Dynam.
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4.3 MaQiT performance

Table **6** shows performance metrics of each method from the standalone version MaQiT. The speed at which users would be able to complete comparable analysis without MaQiT is highly dependent on an individual's existing GIS and/or coding competence. However, for those without coding skills and entry level GIS training it may take a user several minutes to obtain a single value that quantifies the position of one margin. MaQiT therefore provides a potentially major improvement in the efficiency with which users can analyse their data. Results produced by MaQiT are also guaranteed to be methodologically consistent and replicable. This makes MaQiT highly suited to the (re-)analysis of repository datasets of margin change.

5. Summary

Together GEEDiT and MaQiT provide simple tools for rapid satellite image visualisation, exploration and initial assessment (via notes appended to metadata), digitisation of margins from imagery and quantification of their changes via multiple methods. They have the potential to dramatically improve the efficiency with which these analyses can be undertaken, and the accessibility of these data to a wide range of researchers. The lack of the requirement to download, process and store imagery on a user's computer, coupled with simple GUIs and no fee-paying licensing requirements also improves the accessibility to these data through the removal of traditional barriers to entry associated with remote sensing and GIS.

GEEDiT provides flexibility for the way in which imagery is visualised (i.e. true colour, false colour and custom band combinations), while MaQiT gives users the flexibility to rapidly quantify and output measures of margin change. The case study of the calving glacier Breiðamerkurjökull highlights the potential for mismatch between imagery collected via ascending/descending orbits of Sentinel 1 relative to optical imagery satellites such as Landsat and Sentinel 2. Consequently users should take care in combining margin records from Sentinel 1 those of Landsat/Sentinel 2, especially where significant elevation change may have occurred relative to the DEM that is used for terrain correction of imagery in Google Earth Engine.

Intercomparison of the two existing and two new methods of margin change quantification available in MaQiT illustrate the potential for obtaining potentially substantial differences in margin change values when analysing the same data. This highlights the importance of users selecting the most suitable margin quantification method for their particular research problem. The new multicentreline method also provides a means of visualising margin change as a time series potentially in a clearer manner than it is possible to cartographically. While these techniques have predominantly been developed for the quantification of tidewater glacier margin change, they could also be useful for researchers investigating coastal change, dune migration and vegetation extent changes amongst other areas of earth surface science.

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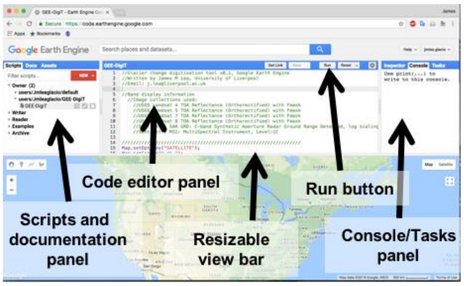
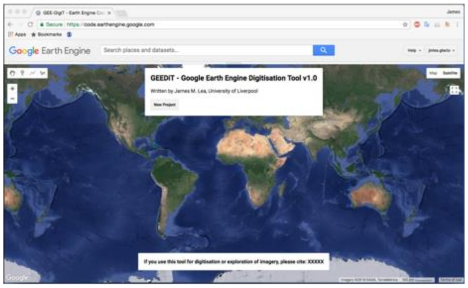
Figures

Earth Surf. Dynam. Discuss., https://doi.org/10.5194/esurf-2018-24
Manuscript under review for journal Earth Surf. Dynam.
Discussion started: 22 March 2018

Step 1 – Google Earth Engine layout:

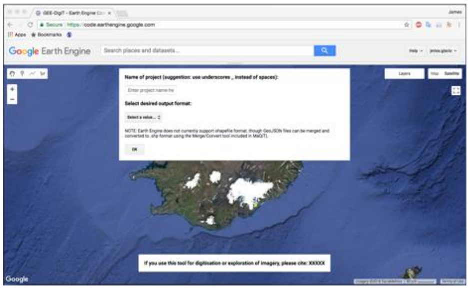


Step 2 – GEE-DigiT welcome screen:

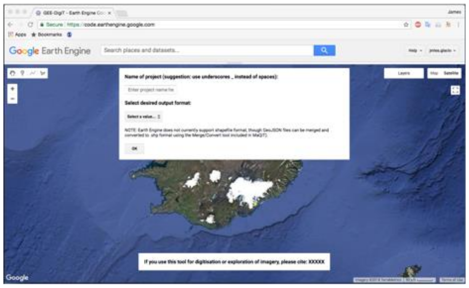


Step 3 – Choose point of interest:

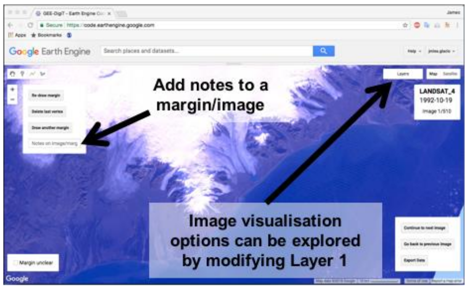
Step 4 – Name project and output file format:



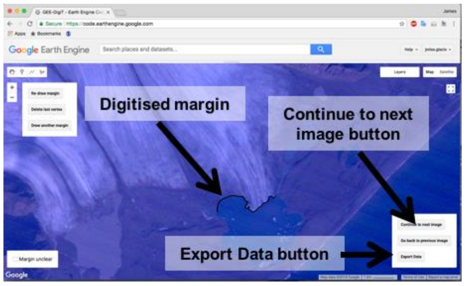
Step 5 – Define visualisation parameters:



Step 6 – View imagery:



Step 7 – Digitise feature of interest for all desired images, then click 'Export Data':



Step 8 – Download exported data to Google Drive:

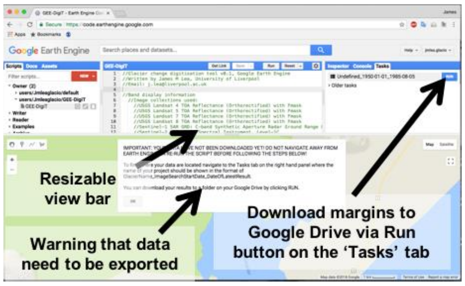
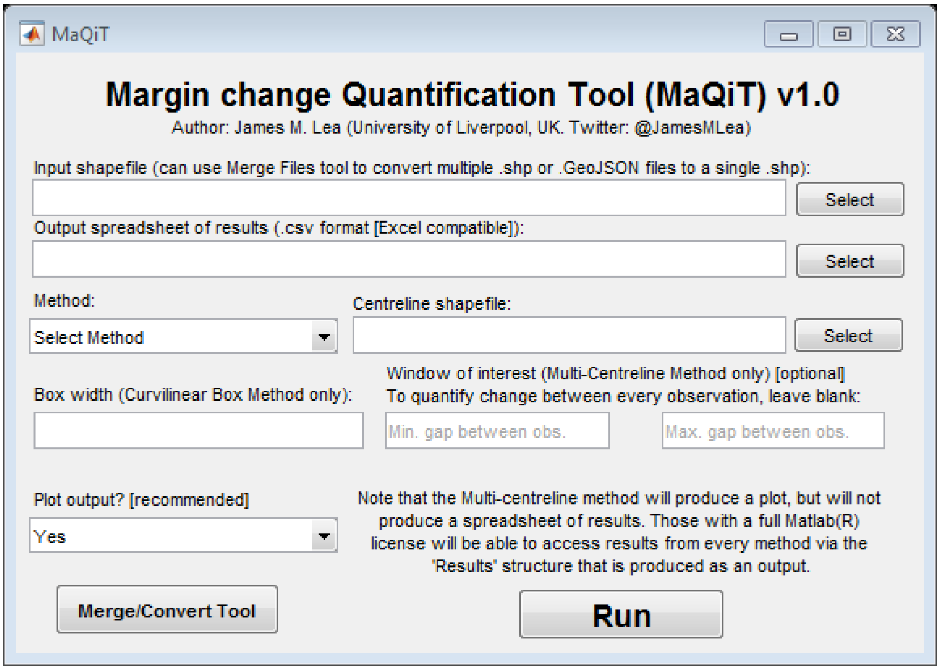


Figure 1 – Steps for running GEEDiT.



Margin change Quantification Tool (MaQiT) v1.0

Author: James M. Lea (University of Liverpool, UK. Twitter: @JamesMLea)

Input shapefile (can use Merge Files tool to convert multiple .shp or .GeoJSON files to a single .shp):

Output spreadsheet of results (.csv format [Excel compatible]):

Method: Select Method

Centreline shapefile:

Box width (Curvilinear Box Method only):

Window of interest (Multi-Centreline Method only) [optional]
To quantify change between every observation, leave blank:

Min. gap between obs.

Max. gap between obs.

Plot output? [recommended] Yes

Note that the Multi-centreline method will produce a plot, but will not produce a spreadsheet of results. Those with a full Matlab(R) license will be able to access results from every method via the 'Results' structure that is produced as an output.

Figure 2 – Graphical user interface of MaQiT as viewed in Windows.

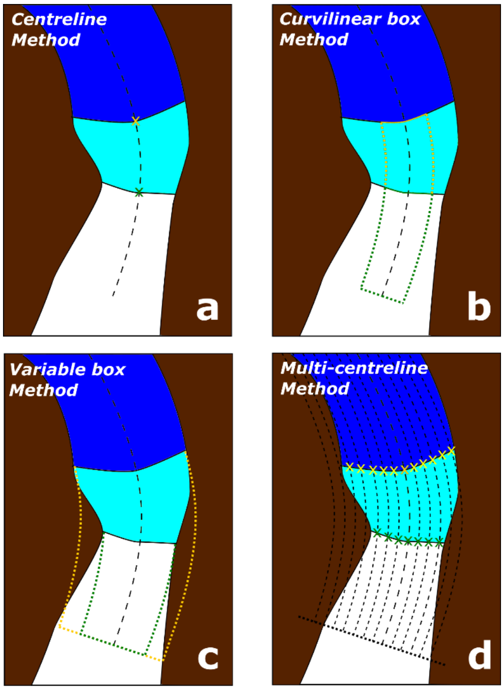


Figure 3. Methods of margin change quantification that can be applied in MaQiT. Example shows the retreat of a tidewater glacier with ice (white), the former glacier extent (light blue) and open water (dark blue). (a) Centreline method takes the linear distance from the start of the centreline to the first point of intersection between the centreline and the margin; (b) Curvilinear box method generates a box of a user defined fixed width that is closed at its downstream edge by the digitised margin, with a one-dimensional measure of the distance from the start of the centreline obtained by dividing the box area by the box width (note that yellow box margin also extends to the start of the centreline); (c) Variable box method operates on the same principle as the curvilinear box method, though box width is automatically defined by MaQiT as the total distance from the end nodes to the centreline; (d) Multi-centreline method operates on the same principle as the Centreline method, though multiple, regularly spaced lines are used to build a two dimensional representation of margin change, with the output using a colour scale to visualise distance.

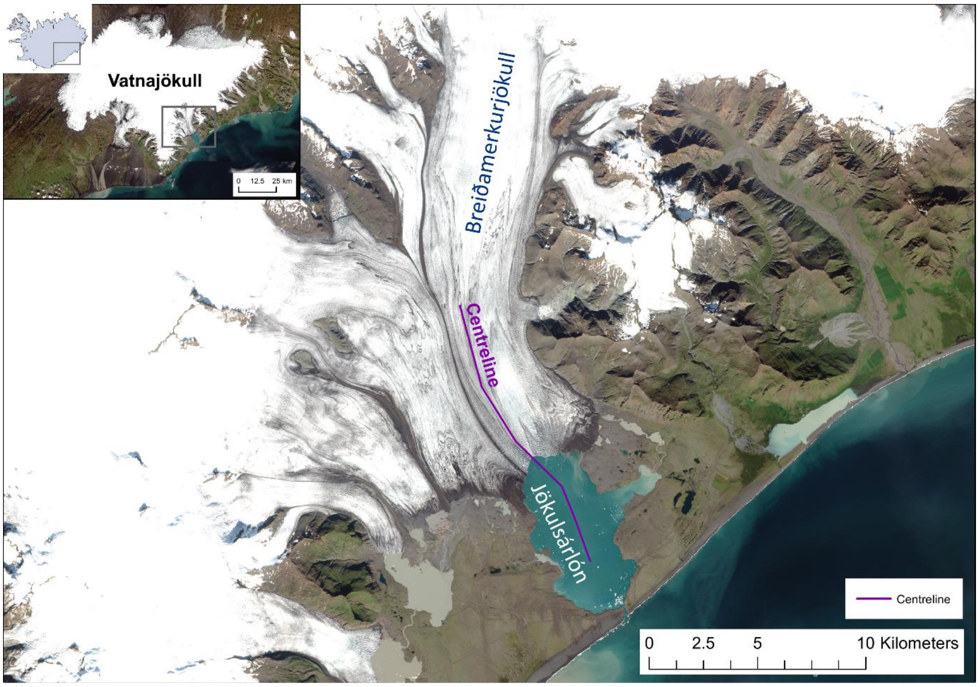


Figure 4 – Location map and centreline of Breiðamerkurjökull, SE Iceland. Imagery shows a true colour composite of four Sentinel 2A scenes acquired on 20/8/2017.

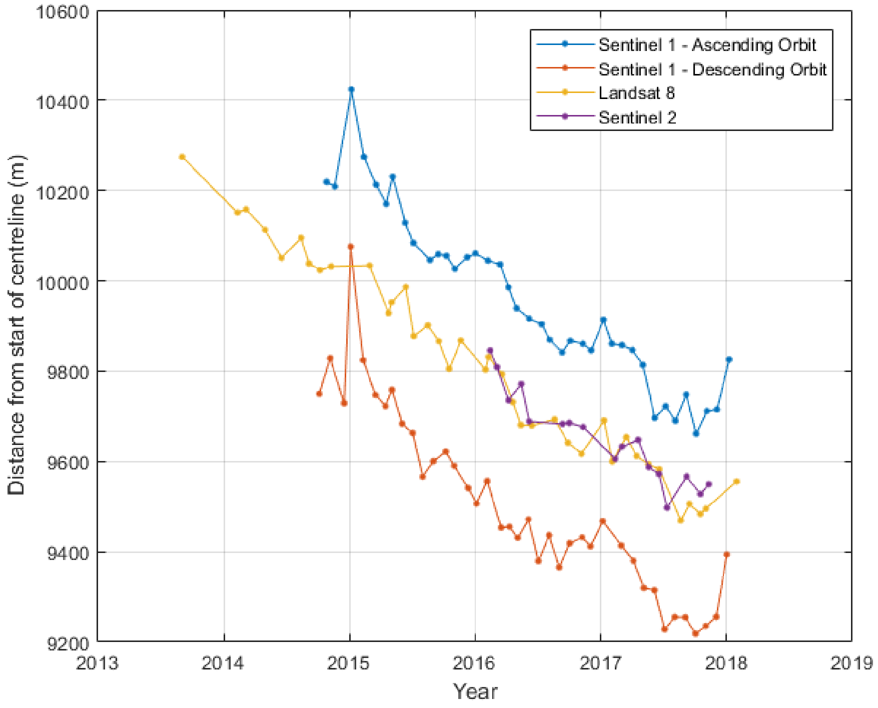


Figure 5 – Intercomparison of monthly margin positions at Breiðamerkurjökull given by the curvilinear box method (width = 2000 m) digitised from different satellites.

Figure 6 – Intercomparison of results from different margin quantification methods applied to the Landsat 8 monthly record of margin positions at Breiðamerkurjökull.

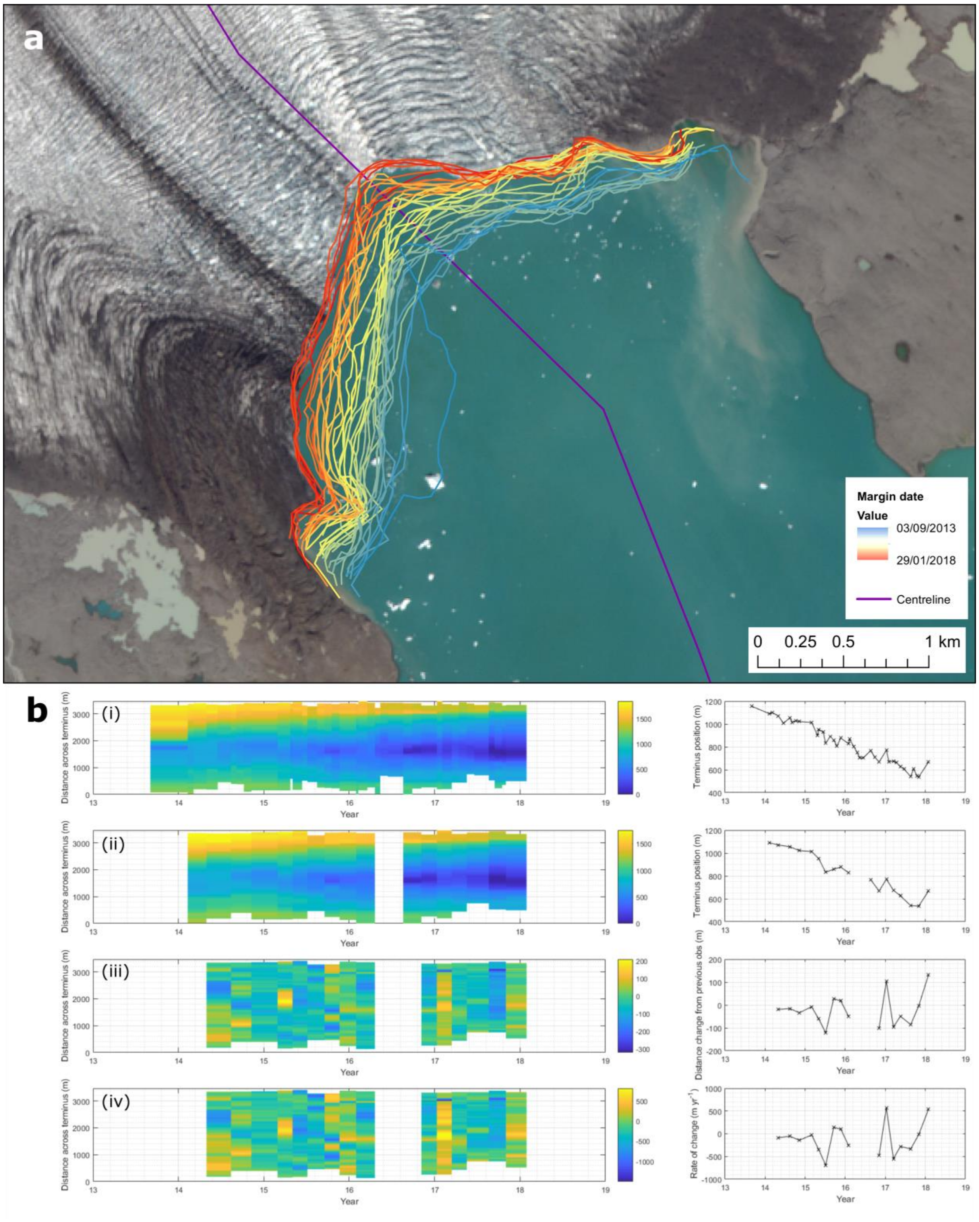


Figure 7 – Margin migration for monthly Landsat 8 observations of Breiðamerkurjökull shown as a time series (a) cartographically, and (b) as results from the multi-centreline method. Panel (b) has four rows of plots showing: (i) margin position for all available observations relative to the most retreated position across the margin; (ii) margin position observations separated by at least 60 days, and a maximum of 120 days (these values are user defined); (iii) total distance change between

observations; and (iv) rate of change of margin in m yr^{-1}. Right hand column of plots display results of the centreline method for comparison.

Tables

Satellite	Imagery type	Lifespan	True Colour Bands (R-G-B)	False Colour Bands (R-G-B)	Image resolution (m)	Notes
Landsat 4	Optical	Jul 1982 - Dec 1993	3-2-1	5-4-3	30	Gamma = 2
Landsat 5	Optical	Mar 1984 - Jan 2013	3-2-1	5-4-3	30	Gamma = 2
Landsat 7	Optical	Apr 1999 -	3-2-1	5-4-3	15	Pansharpened from 30 m to 15 m using band 8; Scan line corrector failure after 31/05/2003; Gamma = 2
Landsat 8	Optical	Feb 2013 -	4-3-2	6-5-4	15	Pansharpened from 30 m to 15 m using band 8; Gamma = 2
Sentinel 1A and 1B	SAR	1A - Apr 2014 - 1B - Apr 2016 -	-	-	10	Horiz. transmit/horiz. receive (HH), or vert. transmit/vert. receive (VV); Min. = -20, Max. = 1
Sentinel 2A and 2B	Optical	2A - Jun 2015 - 2B - Mar 2017 -	4-3-2	8-4-3	10	Gamma = 2; Gain = 0.025

Band combinations, gamma options, max./min. ranges and opacity can be varied manually via the 'Layers' tab in the top right of the screen
Imagery is always stored in 'Layer 1'

Table 1 – Description of satellites and optional band combinations that are built into GEEDiT. Note that certain user defined custom band combinations may have lower resolution.

	Landsat 4 and 5		Landsat 7		Landsat 8		Sentinel 2	
Band number	Band Description	Resolution (m)	Band Description	Resolution (m)	Band Description	Resolution (m)	Band Description	Resolution (m)
1	Blue	30	Blue	30	Ultra blue	30	Coastal aerosol	60
2	Green	30	Green	30	Blue	30	Blue	10
3	Red	30	Red	30	Green	30	Green	10
4	Near-IR	30	Near-IR	30	Red	30	Red	10
5	Shortwave-IR 1	30	Shortwave-IR 1	30	Near-IR	30	Vegetation Red Edge	20
6	Thermal	120* (30)	Thermal	60* (30)	Shortwave-IR 1	30	Vegetation Red Edge	20
7	Shortwave-IR 2	30	Shortwave-IR 2	30	Shortwave-IR 2	30	Vegetation Red Edge	20
8	-	-	Panchromatic	15	Panchromatic	15	Near-IR	10
8A	-	-	-	-	-	-	Narrow near-IR	20
9	-	-	-	-	Cirrus	30	Water vapour	60
10	-	-	-	-	Thermal-IR 1	100* (30)	Shortwave-IR - Cirrus	60
11	-	-	-	-	Thermal-IR 2	100* (30)	Shortwave-IR	20
12	-	-	-	-	-	-	Shortwave-IR	20

Table 2 – Description of bands for optical imagery satellites

Metadata associated with each margin/boundary	Variable name
Date of image acquisition	date
Name of satellite	satellite
Name of Project	Name
Image identification path	image_path
Is the margin unclear?	unclear
Ascending/Descending Sentinel 1 orbit	Asc_Desc
User notes on an image/margin	notes

Table 3 – Fields included in shapefiles produced by GEEDiT/MaQiT

Margins/Boundaries compulsory field names

Variable Name	Notes
X	Can be latitude/longitude or UTM. Note that this field is not normally shown in a GIS attribute table
Y	Can be latitude/longitude or UTM. Note that this field is not normally shown in a GIS attribute table
Date	Must be in the format YYYY_MM_DD (the YMD seperators do not have to be _'s though /'s are discouraged
Geometry	Line'/'Polyline'/similar

Centreline/transect compulsory shapefile field names

Variable Name	Notes
X	Can be latitude/longitude or UTM. Note that this field is not normally shown in a GIS attribute table
Y	Can be latitude/longitude or UTM. Note that this field is not normally shown in a GIS attribute table
Geometry	Line'/'Polyline'/similar

Table 4 – Compulsory field names for shapefile inputs into MaQiT

Satellite	Margins Digitised	Mean Path Length (m)	Mean width (m)	Mean number of vertices	Mean distance between points (m)
Sentinel 1 (asc.)	39	5643	3357	70.9	82.7
Sentinel 1 (desc.)	39	6204	3316	67.3	95.6
Landsat 8	38	4797	3052	61.6	79.7
Sentinel 2	17	4644	2924	64.1	77.2
Total	133	5869	3203	66.6	91.1

Table 5 – Summary statistics for the margins digitised from different satellites

Method	**Satellite**	**Number of observations**	**Total calculation time (sec)**	**Calculation time per observation (sec)**
Centreline Method	Landsat 8	38	0.49	0.013
Curvilinear Box Method	Landsat 8	38	3.43	0.090
Variable Box Method	Landsat 8	38	2.81	0.074
Multi-centreline Method	Landsat 8	38	4.56	0.12

Table 6 – MaQiT performance metrics