

1 **Hot rocks in a cold place: high sub-glacial heat flow in**
2 **East Antarctica**

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14 Abbreviated title “**Geothermal heat flow in East Antarctica**”

15 **Abstract: Numerical models are the primary predictive tools for understanding the**
16 **dynamic behavior of the Antarctic ice sheet. But a key boundary parameter –sub-glacial**
17 **heat flow – remains poorly constrained. We show that variations in abundance and**
18 **distribution of heat-producing elements within the Antarctic continental crust result in**
19 **greater and more variable regional sub-glacial heat flows than currently assumed in ice**
20 **modeling studies. Such elevated heat flows would fundamentally impact on ice sheet**
21 **behaviour and highlight that geological controls on heat flow must be considered to**
22 **obtain more accurate and refined predictions of ice mass balance and sea level change.**

23

24

25 **Keywords:** heat flow, heat production, Antarctica, Prydz Bay, South Australian Heat Flow
26 Anomaly, Mawson Craton.

27

28 The Antarctic ice sheet plays a fundamental role in controlling ocean circulation, sea level
29 and global climate (Alley *et al.* 2005). As such, significant effort has been directed to
30 understanding ice sheet behavior and ice mass balance, particularly in the context of
31 anthropogenic global climate change. Major physical parameters that influence ice sheet
32 behavior include ice sheet margin-ocean interaction, bedrock topography, long-term climate
33 variability and basal ice-bed interface conditions, such as bed roughness, melt water
34 availability, water-saturated soft sediment deformation and hydrology networks (e.g.
35 Winborrow *et al.* 2010).

36 Another critical yet poorly constrained parameter is the heat flow supplied to the base
37 of the ice sheet (e.g. Waddington 1987; Greve 2005; Näslund *et al.* 2005; Pollard *et al.* 2005).
38 This sub-glacial heat flow is from geothermal sources and is the sum of the amount of heat
39 supplied to the conductive lithosphere from the convective mantle and the heat generated
40 within the lithosphere from the radiogenic decay of the heat-producing elements (HPEs) –
41 primarily U, Th and K (Turcotte and Schubert 2002). The HPEs are incompatible in mantle
42 rocks and are preferentially fractionated, by various geological processes, into dominantly
43 felsic rocks of the upper continental crust (e.g. Sandiford & McLaren 2002). The distribution
44 of HPEs varies spatially and temporally within the crust meaning there are local and regional
45 scale geological controls on sub-glacial heat flow.

46 Elevated sub-glacial heat flow can: (1) affect ice rheology and viscosity; (2) facilitate

47 local pressure melting of the basal ice resulting in mechanical decoupling of the basal ice-rock
48 interface, the formation of sub-glacial meltwater, basal hydrological networks and sub-glacial
49 lakes and; (3) promote development of easily-deformed water-saturated basal till and other
50 unconsolidated sediments (e.g. Greve & Hutter 1995; Siegert 2000). These factors can
51 facilitate ice surging and ice stream flow (e.g. Greve 2005; Pollard *et al.* 2005; Llubes *et al.*
52 2006). For example, Näslund *et al.* (2005) showed that a modest 17% increase in average sub-
53 glacial heat flow beneath the Fennoscandian ice sheet would facilitate local ice sheet
54 mobilization and ice streaming from a 40% increase in basal melt production.

55 The Antarctic ice sheet is divided into the West Antarctic ice sheet (WAIS) and the
56 East Antarctic ice sheet (EAIS) along the axis of the Transantarctic Mountains (TAMS, Fig.
57 1A). Sub-glacial heat flow beneath the WAIS is elevated due to active rifting and volcanism;
58 direct borehole heat flow measurements from McMurdo Sound and western Ross Sea are
59 between 60 and 164 mWm^{-2} (e.g. Schröder *et al.* 2011). In contrast, sub-glacial heat flow
60 beneath the EAIS has not been measured directly and ‘global average’ values for stable
61 continental crust, typically between c. 42 and 65 mWm^{-2} , have been assumed (e.g., Sclater *et*
62 *al.* 1980; Pollard *et al.* 2005; Llubes *et al.* 2006). Alternatively, sub-glacial heat flow has been
63 estimated using low-resolution remotely sensed data such as global seismic tomography
64 (Shapiro & Ritzwoller 2004) or satellite-based geomagnetic observations (Fox Maule *et al.*
65 2005). These methods also yield similar estimates c. 50-60 mWm^{-2} but explicitly assume a
66 thermally homogenous crust in which the primary control on heat flow is the variation in the
67 mantle contribution as a function of crustal thickness. These approaches do not account for
68 any possible thermal effect of crustal rocks enriched in heat-producing elements.

69 We show, using two geologically unrelated examples from (1) George V Land-Terre
70 Adélie region and (2) eastern Prydz Bay, East Antarctica (Fig. 1a), that heat flow in East
71 Antarctica is highly heterogeneous and profoundly influenced by the presence and variable

72 distribution of crustal rocks enriched in heat-producing elements. Furthermore, we suggest
73 that for numerical ice sheet modelling simplified sub-glacial heat flow estimates that ignore
74 the crustal contribution to surface heat flow, and its variability, may be inappropriate.

75

76 **THE MAWSON CONTINENT AND THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN HEAT FLOW** 77 **ANOMALY**

78 Prior to the breakup of Gondwana, the Gawler and Curnamona cratons of South Australia and
79 Terre Adélie and George V Land of East Antarctica are thought to have been contiguous,
80 forming a crustal entity known as the Mawson Craton (Fig. 1b; Fanning *et al.* 1996; Boger
81 2011; Gibson *et al.* 2012). Despite recognition of the striking geological similarities between
82 outcrops along the Terre Adélie and George V Land coast and the Gawler Craton (e.g. Peucat
83 *et al.* 2002) the full sub-glacial extent of the Mawson Craton remains unknown, although
84 available geophysical data indicate that the craton may extend as much as 800 km into the
85 interior of the Antarctic (Finn *et al.* 2006).

86 Recognizing this connection is important for understanding the thermal conditions
87 beneath the EAIS because the Australian component of the Mawson Craton is characterized
88 by domains of high modern-day surface heat flow (for heat flow and heat production
89 definitions see supplementary material). Such high heat flow domains include the regional
90 South Australian Heat Flow Anomaly (SAHFA; Fig. 1c) and the broader continental-scale
91 Central Australian Heat Flow Province (Sass & Lachenbruch 1979). The SAHFA has an
92 average modern surface heat flow of $92 \pm 10 \text{ mWm}^{-2}$ (Neumann *et al.* 2000), 2-3 times that of
93 average global continental crust of similar age (e.g., Nyblade & Pollack 1993), with 60-75
94 mWm^{-2} from the contribution of HPEs within the crust (Neumann *et al.* 2000). Such a
95 contribution from crustal sources is highly anomalous as typical continental crust contributes

96 only 18-48 mWm⁻² (McLaren *et al.* 2003). The high heat-producing (HHP) rocks within the
97 Gawler Craton component of the SAHFA are largely Palaeo- to Mesoproterozoic aged
98 granites (Fig. 1d) which have an average heat production of 5-9 μ Wm⁻³ (c.f. the global
99 average granitic heat production of 2.5 μ Wm⁻³; e.g. Rybach 1976; see supplementary Table
100 A1); this average includes the voluminous and areally extensive Mesoproterozoic Gawler
101 Range Volcanics and granites of the Hiltaba Suite (Fig. 1b). Heat production values as high as
102 62 μ Wm⁻³ are reported for granitic bodies in the Curnamona Craton (Neumann *et al.* 2000;
103 Mount Painter Province; Fig. 1b), in the northeast of the SAHFA.

104 Further support for the presence of elevated sub-glacial heat flow beneath Terre
105 Adélie and George V Land is provided by the study of sub-glacial lakes by Siegert &
106 Downswell (1996). They conclude that to induce local basal ice pressure melting and form the
107 observed sub-glacial lakes in Terre Adélie and George V Land (Siegert & Downswell 1996, p.
108 502, fig. 1), 25-50 mWm⁻² of geothermal heat, in addition to the assumed basal heat flow of c.
109 55 mWm⁻², is required. This implies a sub-glacial heat flow of c. 79-104 mWm⁻² – a value
110 that closely matches that of the SAHFA. Although Siegert & Downswell (1996) conclude that
111 the additional heat required for basal melting is derived from internal ice deformation and
112 shearing, they also acknowledge the possibility of an elevated geothermal heat flow. We
113 suggest that given the likely extension of HHP rocks of the SAHFA into the Terre Adélie and
114 George V Land region, this possibility is highly likely and one that has not previously been
115 considered for estimates of sub-glacial heat flow there (e.g. Pollard *et al.* 2005)

116 Recognizing that the HHP crustal rocks and elevated heat flow characteristics of the
117 SAHFA extend into the Antarctic continent emphasizes the inherent thermal heterogeneity of
118 continental crust; this must be acknowledged if realistic and useful estimates of heat flow
119 within Antarctica are to be developed. It also illustrates the importance of understanding the
120 sub-glacial basement geology and potential impact on the cryosphere and the valuable

121 insights that can be gained from examination of adjacent Gondwana crustal fragments.

122

123 **2D THERMAL MODELLING OF PRYDZ BAY AND THE EFFECT OF CAMBRIAN** 124 **GRANITES**

125 In our second example, the eastern shore of Prydz Bay, East Antarctica, is
126 characterized by a number of ice-free bedrock exposures along ~ 300 km of coastline
127 including the Vestfold Hills, Rauer Islands, Larsemann Hills, and other small peninsulas and
128 offshore islands (Fig. 2a). Prior to the breakup of Gondwana, the Prydz Bay area is thought to
129 have been juxtaposed along the eastern coastline of India (e.g. Boger 2011) and is unrelated to
130 the previous example. The Vestfold Hills comprises mostly Neoproterozoic orthogneisses and
131 paragneisses (e.g. Sheraton *et al.* 1984) while south of the Sørsdal Glacier (Fig. 2a), the Prydz
132 Bay coastline comprises Palaeo- to Mesoarchaeal and Palaeoproterozoic rocks (e.g. Kinny *et*
133 *al.* 1993), which, unlike the Vestfold Hills, were profoundly affected by both Neoproterozoic
134 and Cambrian granulite-facies tectonothermal events, and intruded by felsic Cambrian
135 granites.

136 Table 1 is a summary of heat production data calculated using measured U, Th and
137 K₂O contents of outcrop samples (Carson & Pittard 2012) along the Prydz Bay transect (Fig.
138 2a). The data illustrate the generally low heat production of Vestfold Hills rocks (c. 0.4 μWm^{-3})
139 and of the Proterozoic and Archaean rocks exposed in the Rauer Islands (c. 1.5 μWm^{-3}) and
140 in southern Prydz Bay (c. 2.4 μWm^{-3}). In contrast, Cambrian-aged granites have significantly
141 elevated (median c. 13 μWm^{-3}) and variable, heat production values (c. 4-66 μWm^{-3}),
142 principally due to elevated Th concentrations. We note that Cambrian granites and pegmatites
143 elsewhere in East Antarctica, such as the Denman Glacier region, also have elevated heat
144 production (Carson & Pittard 2012).

145 To explore the implications of the presence of these HHP Cambrian intrusives on
146 regional heat flow, we constructed a 2-D model of the gross geometry of the continental
147 lithosphere for a section through Prydz Bay (Fig. 2a; supplementary data). As detailed seismic
148 data is not yet available, our section is necessarily simplified but includes all key geological
149 components (see supplementary material for additional model details). The distribution of
150 HHP granites is based on their known outcrop distribution and heat production values are
151 from Carson & Pittard (2012). The resultant surface heat flow distribution was calculated
152 using the finite element analysis modeling software COMSOL Multiphysics (v4.2).

153 Heat flow modeling (Fig. 2b) predicts that the Vestfold Hills Block and the Rauer
154 Islands have relatively low and uniform surface heat flows of c. 31 mWm^{-2} and c. 44 mWm^{-2}
155 respectively (average heat flow across individual crustal blocks). In contrast, significantly
156 higher and more variable heat flow is predicted for southern Prydz Bay. The model predicts a
157 background heat flow of c. 60-70 mWm^{-2} in southern Prydz Bay, however occurrence of HHP
158 Cambrian granites have a profound impact on heat flow with local ‘hot-spots’ of heat flow c.
159 80-90 mWm^{-2} and much as 120 mWm^{-2} (Fig. 2b) We emphasize that our heat flow estimates
160 for Prydz Bay probably represent *minimum* values as we conservatively use only the known
161 surface extent of the HHP Cambrian granites. We speculate that the HHP granites may be
162 more widespread beneath the modern ice cover as aeromagnetic data (e.g. ‘Amery Lineament’
163 of Golynsky *et al.* 2002) in southern Prydz Bay, shows rounded high response magnetic
164 anomalies coincident with surface outcrops of the HHP granites and which may represent
165 large, unexposed, HHP intrusive provinces. The approximate boundaries of these anomalies
166 are indicated in Figure 2A.

167 Importantly, the local high heat flow associated with volumetrically small HHP
168 Cambrian intrusives and the higher heat flow in granite-dominated domains are both
169 significantly higher than values normally assumed for the East Antarctic continental crust.

170 Notably, both the magnitude and, in particular, the variability of the sub-glacial heat flow
171 calculated here for sections of the Prydz Bay coast are not predicted by the low-resolution
172 continent-scale heat flow estimates of Fox Maule *et al.* (2005) and Shapiro & Ritzwoller
173 (2004) which show uniform values of heat flow of c. 60 mWm^{-2} over much of East Antarctica.
174 Our calculations predict marked regional thermal variability of the continental crust and
175 highlight the likelihood of heterogeneity of sub-glacial heat flow in East Antarctica.
176 Furthermore, the heat flow modeling presented here highlights the need for geophysical
177 delineation of the location and distribution of sub-glacial Cambrian-aged orogenic terrains,
178 associated HHP granites and potential elevated regional heat flow. This information will be
179 critical to develop a better understanding of the regional heat flow characteristics of the
180 Antarctic crust and the potential impact on numerical ice sheet models of the Antarctic Ice
181 Sheet.

182

183 **CONCLUSIONS**

184 The East Antarctic continental crust is characterized by elevated geothermal heat flow that
185 varies spatially on local and regional scales. Tectonic reconstructions provide a valid
186 connection with documented high heat flow domains in southern Australia. In addition heat
187 flow modeling in Prydz Bay indicate that local crustal heat flow in East Antarctica can be as
188 much as 2-3 times higher than the ‘normal’ stable continental values used in ice dynamics
189 modeling. Our study has demonstrated that there are significant variations in heat production
190 of surface rocks, which imply remarkable variation in heat flow (>150%) over comparatively
191 short horizontal length scales (10-100 km).

192 Although detailed assessment of the sub-glacial heat flow field also requires an
193 understanding of crustal thermal conductivity variations and the vertical and lateral extent of

194 HHP rocks, the assumption that the crust is thermally homogeneous—as used by remotely-
195 sensed continental-scale heat flow mapping techniques—is clearly inappropriate and a critical
196 reminder that both local and regional geology must be considered in ice modeling studies.

197

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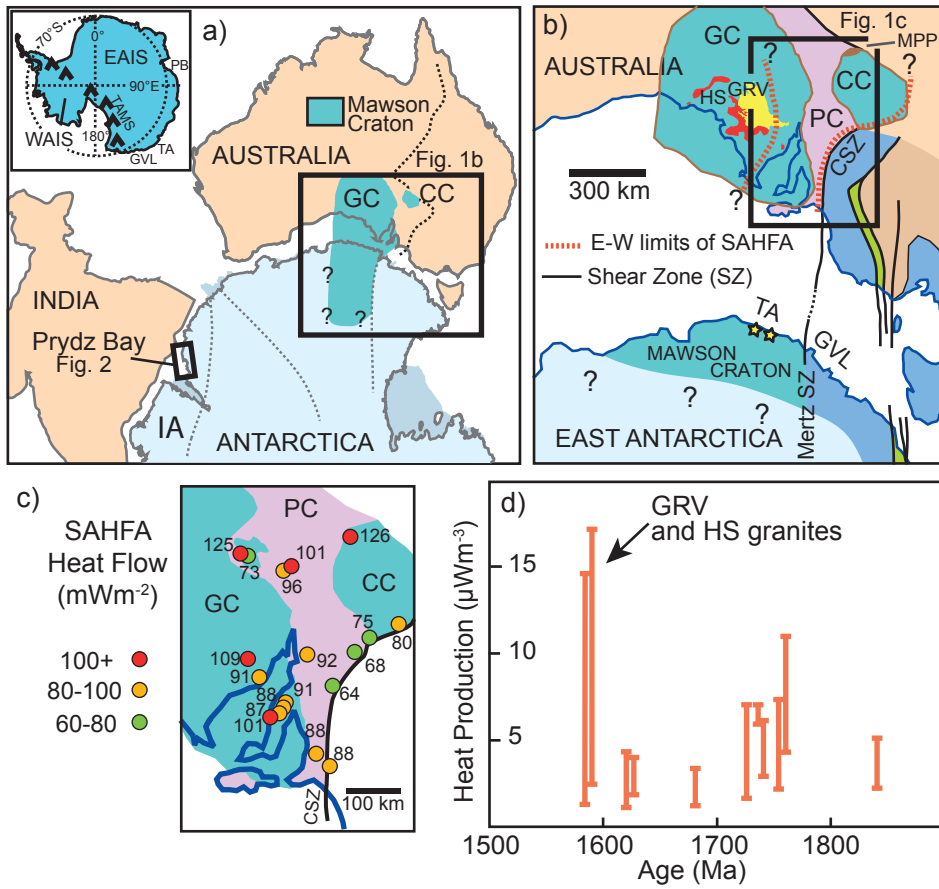
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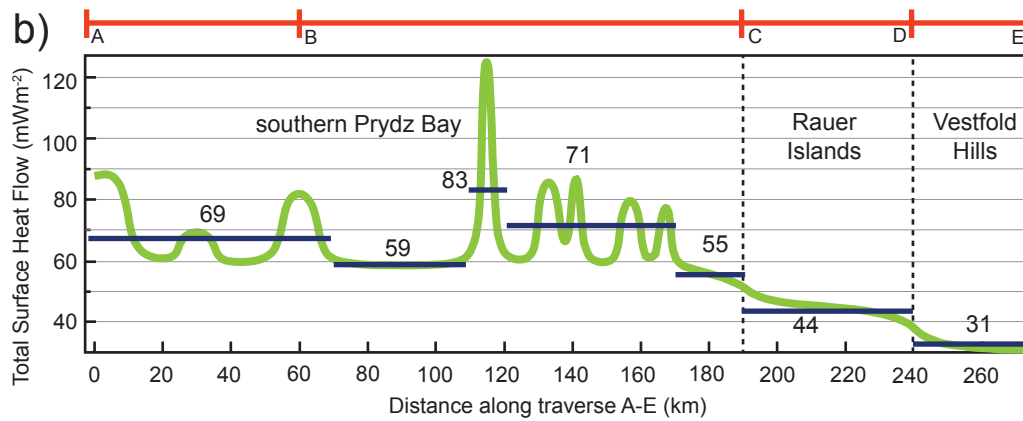
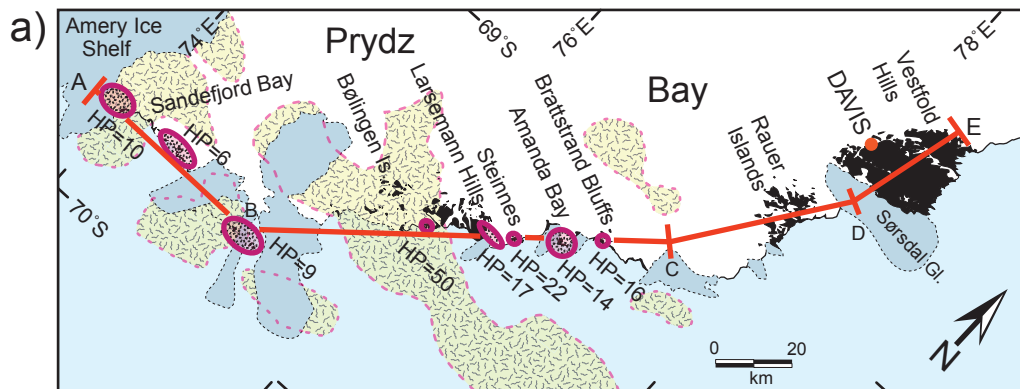
286 **Figure Captions**

287 **Fig. 1. (a)** Location of Australia, India and Antarctica in preEocene configuration
288 showing, the interpreted extent of the Mawson Craton and location of Prydz Bay (PB; Fig. 2a).
289 Prydz Bay is identified as having Indian affinities (IA = Indo-Antarctic Craton after Boger,
290 2011. Other dashed lines in Antarctica correspond to crustal elements defined by Boger,
291 2011.). Inset, map of Antarctica showing East and West Antarctic Ice Sheets (EAIS, WAIS
292 respectively). **(b)** Major geological features of the Mawson Craton. Yellow stars show
293 location of moraine samples that correlate with GRV in the Gawler Craton (Peucat *et al.*
294 2002). GRV = Gawler Range Volcanics and HS = Hiltaba Suite (both c. 1600-1585 Ma); TA
295 = Terre Adelie; GVL = George V Land; GC = Gawler Craton; CC = Curnamona Craton; MPP
296 = Mount Painter Province; CSZ = Coorong Shear Zone (Gibson *et al.* 2012); SAHFA = South
297 Australian Heat Flow Anomaly; PC = Proterozoic Cover. **(c)** Heat flow measurements from
298 the SAHFA (Neumann *et al.* 2000). **(d)** Range of heat production versus emplacement age for
299 felsic intrusives from the Gawler Craton (n = 233); note elevated heat production range for
300 Mesoproterozoic intrusives of the GRV and HS granites (arrowed).

301 **Fig. 2. (a)** East Prydz Bay coastline, East Antarctica, showing the areas of outcrop (solid
302 black) as discussed in the text. The 275 km transect (A-E) for 2-D heat flow modeling and the
303 location and extent of known HHP Cambrian granites (purple ellipses; average heat
304 production, HP, for each granite occurrence is shown in μWm^{-3}) are shown. Dashed outlines
305 represent **possible** sub-glacial extents of HHP granites inferred from geomagnetic surveys
306 (e.g. Golynsky *et al.* 2002). Dark blue areas represent coastal outlet glaciers and floating ice
307 shelves, light blue represents continental East Antarctic ice sheet. **(b)** Calculated heat flow
308 profile across the modeled section illustrating the significant impact of the HHP Cambrian
309 granites of southern Prydz Bay region on the calculated sub-glacial heat flow; the red line
310 marked A-E is the transect shown in Fig. 2a. The green line indicates modeled surface heat
311 flow along transect A-E; the seven solid dark blue horizontal lines are average heat flow

312 values (in mWm^{-2}) for selected sections of traverse A-E.







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