Quantifying changes in the dynamic cryosphere with high-resolution satellite imagery

Automated, open-source photogrammetric workflows for sensor correction, DEM generation and glacier velocity

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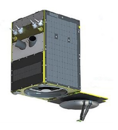
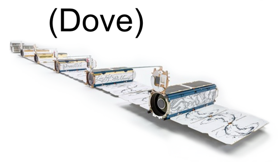
#C31B-1507

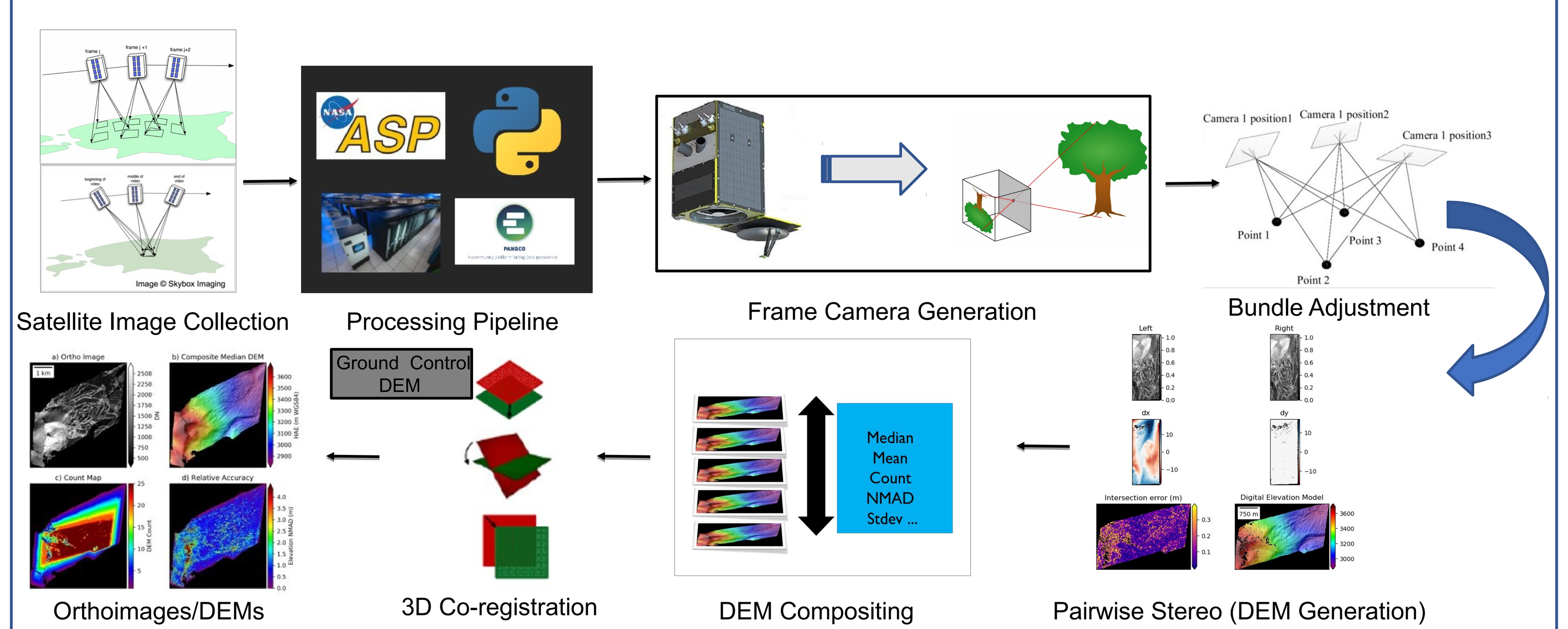
Summary

- We are using high-resolution commercial (DigitalGlobe and Planet) satellite imagery to study geodetic change of snow/ice in complex mountain topography over High-mountain Asia and Western North America.
- Preliminary results for Planet SkySat (0.9 m stereo), PlanetScope (3-5 m).
- Developing sensor model corrections to reduce artifacts, improve accuracy.
- Developing automated, open-source workflows to generate DEMs, orthoimages and derived products (elevation change, surface displacement).
- Applications: seasonal snowpack, monthly glacier velocity evolution.

Sensors

	Opportunities	Challenges
Planet Skysat 	• 13 Satellites in orbit • Less tasking competition • Multiview stereo (triplet, video mode) • 0.7 to 1 m GSD	• Small scene footprint (1-2 km²). • RPC geolocation errors: 10 to 100 m. • Stereo accuracy reduced in terrain with significant relief.
Planet PlanetScope (Dove) 	• ~150 satellites in orbit • Scene footprint (100-200 km²) • Continuous daily coverage • 3 to 5 m GSD • Short-term surface displacement • Potential multi-view stereo	• Saturated visible bands over snow/ice • Poor stereo geometry (small convergence angles) • Poor geolocation L3 orthorectified images • Band-to-band registration (parallax issues over terrain)

Methodology



DEM/Orthoimage Generation

- Create custom frame camera model from satellite/image metadata (RPCs)
- Bundle adjustment to correct relative position and orientation of all cameras
- Identify valid stereopair combinations and run pairwise stereo
- Co-register DEMs to accurate control data (Lidar, ICESat-2 WorldView DEMs)
- Create composite DEM (median, weighted average) and per-pixel statistics (NMAD)
- Generate orthoimages using composite DEM and mosaic

Derived Products: Elev. Change & Velocity

- DEM differencing to quantify elevation and volume change
  - Seasonal snow depth, glacier elevation change and mass balance, response to natural hazard events (landslides, avalanches, volcanic deformation).
- Sub-pixel feature tracking between orthoimage pairs to produce time series of surface velocity observations with short interval (weeks to months).

Skysat Triplet Stereo DEMs

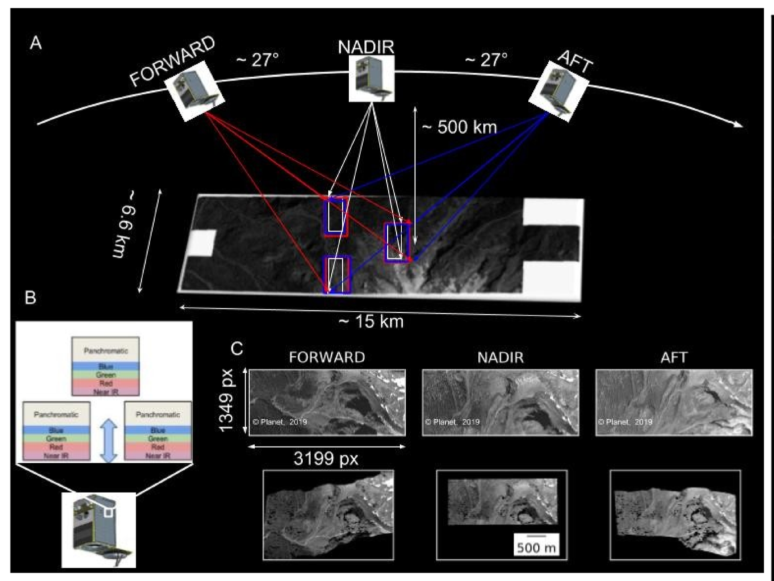
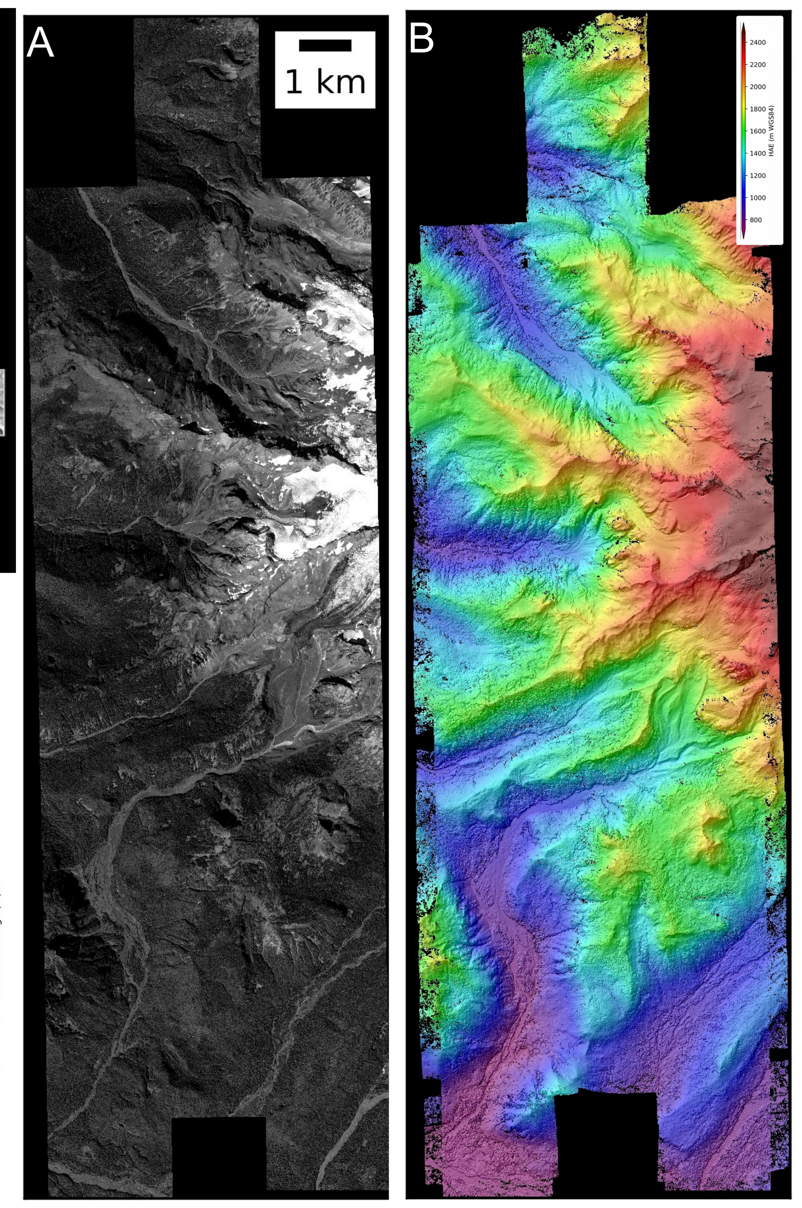


Figure 1: A) Skysat Triplet image acquisition geometry (not to scale). B) SkySat camera 3-CCD focal plane geometry. C) L1B frames and orthoimages. Note the difference in perspective for forward, nadir and aft images.



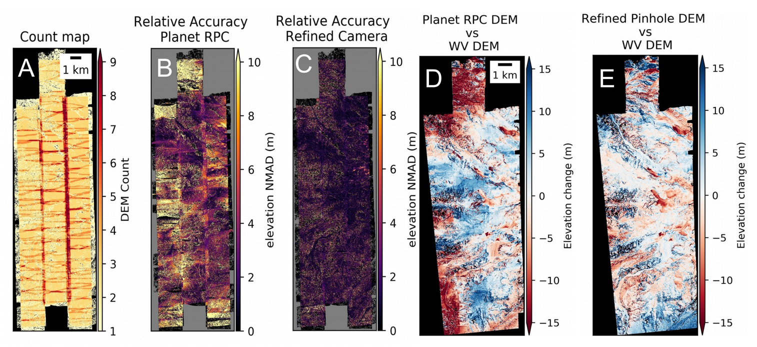


Figure 3: Mt. Rainier SkySat Triplet DEM metrics. A) DEM Count Map, B/C) per-pixel Normalized Median Absolute Difference (NMAD) before and after correction and bundle adjustment, D/E) Elevation difference between WV DEM composite (~2015) and Skysat DEM before and after correction. Refined camera models and relative position/orientation of all frames results in improved relative and absolute accuracy.

Figure 2: Sample Skysat triplet stereo products acquired August 27, 2019 for the western flank of Mt. Rainier, WA. a) Composite orthoimage, b) Composite 4-m DEM from 641 individual DEMs created using all two-scene stereo combinations.

Skysat Video: Multi-View Stereo

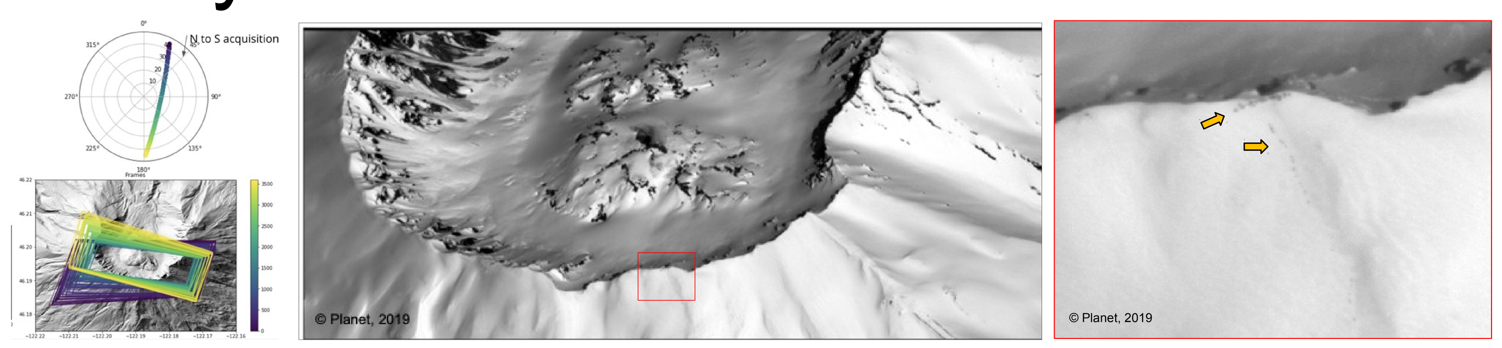


Figure 4: Left) SkySat video acquisition geometry and footprints for video frames 0-3600 of Mt. St. Helen's April 20, 2019 collect. Center) sample off-nadir video frame near the end of the video sequence. Right) Detail showing climbers approaching the summit.

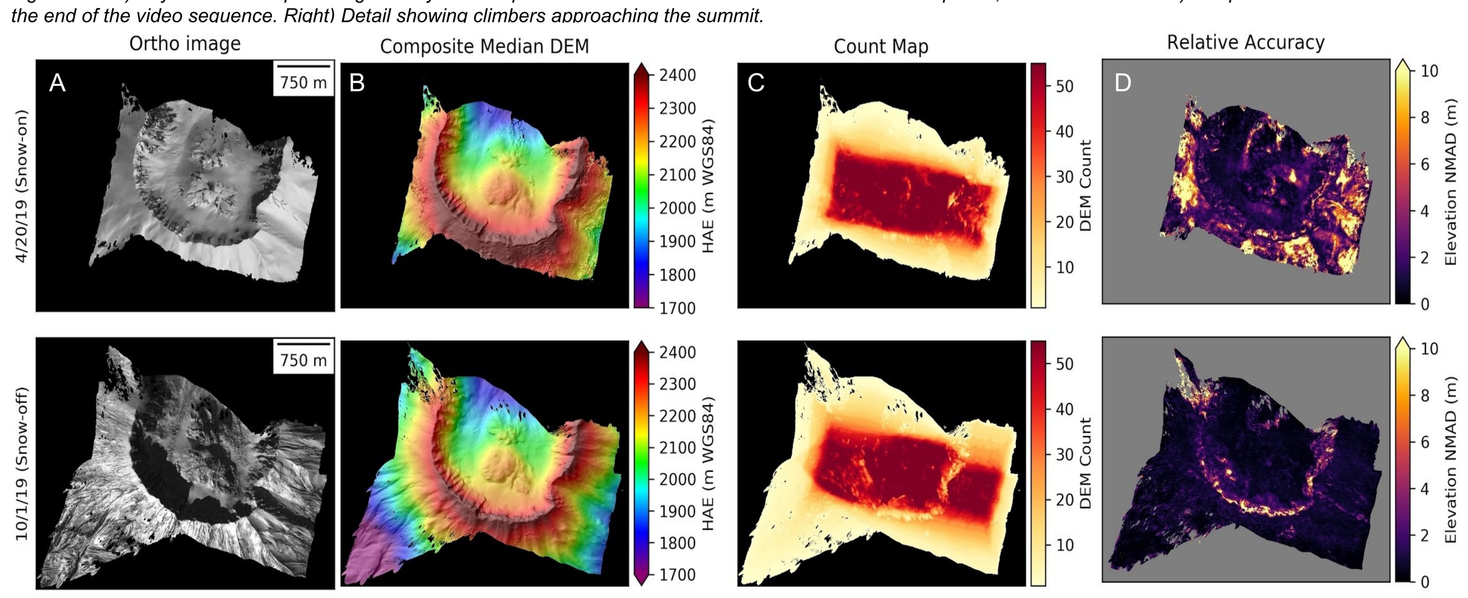


Figure 5: SkySat video products for Mt. St. Helen's crater, acquired April 20, 2019 (near peak SWE, top row) and October 1st (near end of melt season, bottom row): a) Orthorectified image mosaic, b) Composite ASP DSM from 55 stereo pairs, c) per-pixel DSM count, and d) per-pixel Normalized Mean Absolute Difference (NMAD), which provides metric for relative accuracy of composite DSM. Note DSM quality over steep crater wall slopes and <1 m relative accuracy over crater floor.

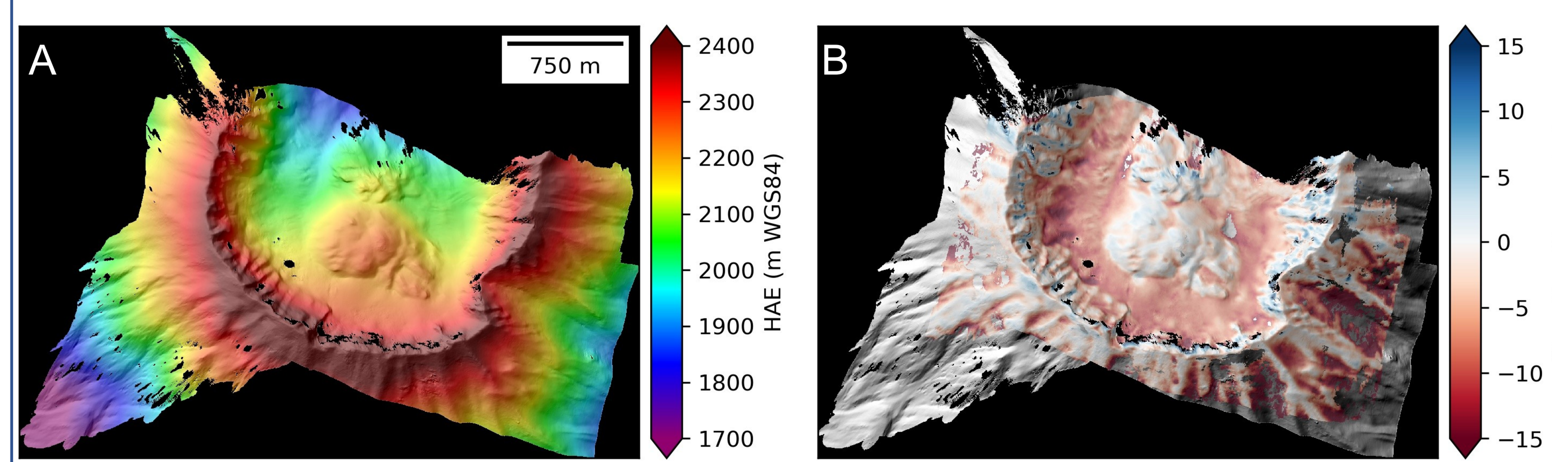


Figure 6: a) Enlarged Oct. 1 DSM. b) Preliminary SkySat elevation difference map, showing snow melt between April and October.

PlanetScope Glacier Velocity

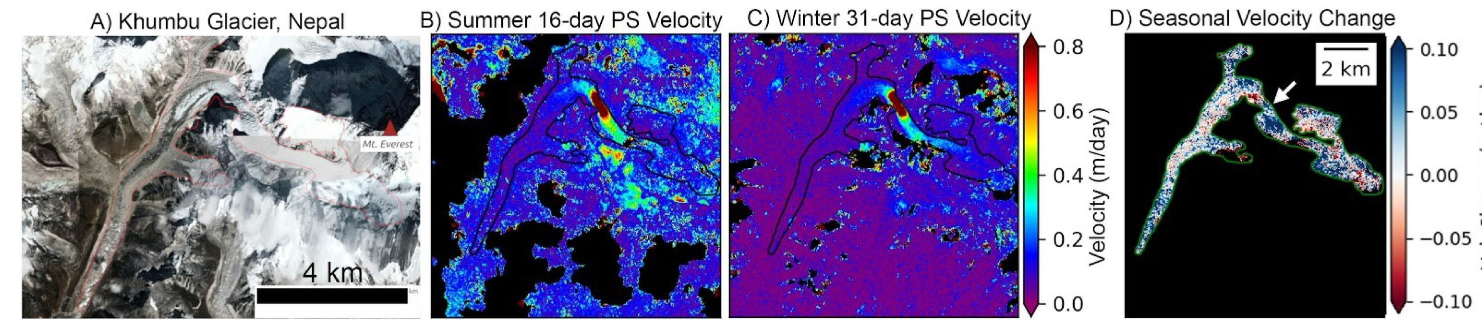


Figure 7: Seasonal velocity for Khumbu Glacier derived from corrected PS 3-m orthoimages with 16-day and 31-day separation for June-July (summer) (B) and October-November (winter) (C), respectively (arrow in D highlights seasonal change below/above fast-flowing region of Khumbu icefall).

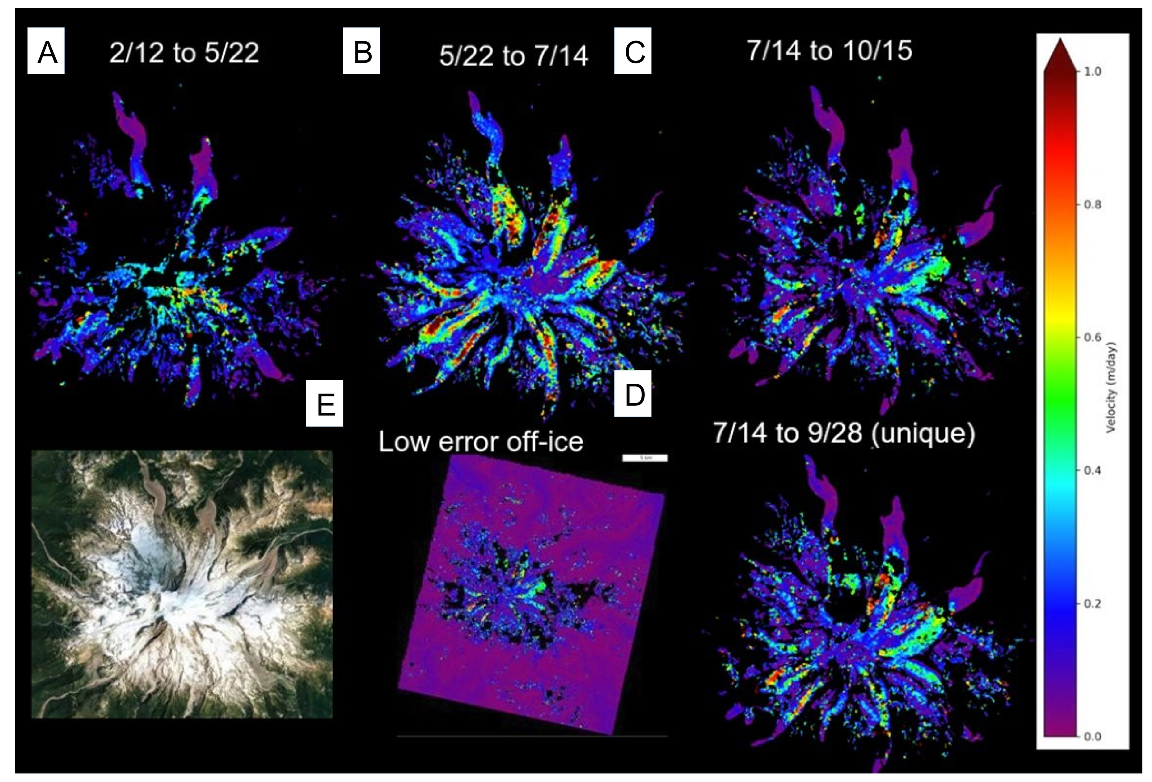


Figure 8: Seasonal Velocity variations for Glaciers at Mt. Rainier, WA derived from correct PS 3-m orthoimages. Note the reactivation of debris-covered lower Carbon and Winthrop Glaciers in late spring and the low error over static surface.

PlanetScope DEM

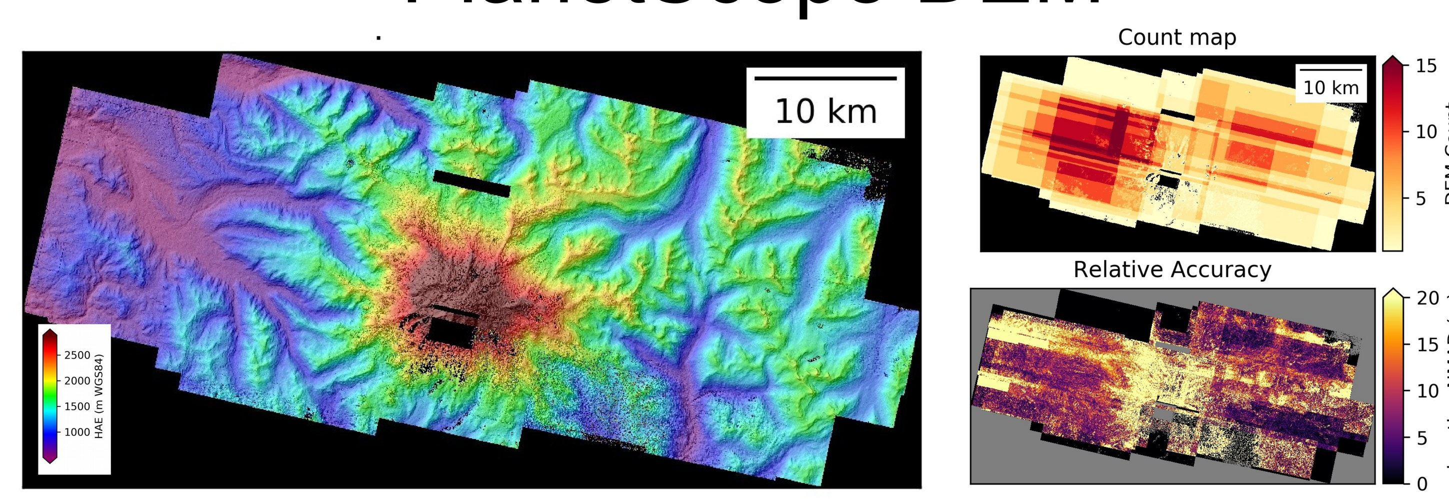


Figure 9: Preliminary Composite PlanetScope DEM (left) , DEM count and NMAD (right) from candidate pairs in Fall 2017 over Mt. Rainier, WA.

PlanetScope Archive

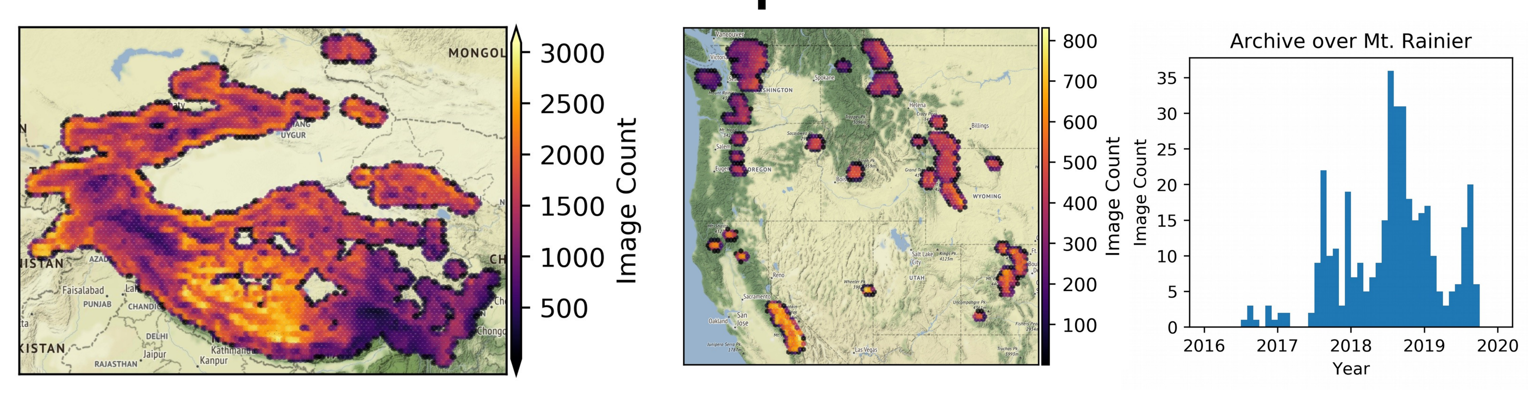


Figure 10: Left) Cloud-free PlanetScope imagery over High-Moutain Asia (<20% cloud cover) and CONUS (<30% cloud cover). Right) Monthly, cloud-free PS coverage over Mt. Rainier, WA, USA.

Future Work

- ❑Implement refined corrections to further improve Skysat DEM accuracy, reduce uncertainties in PlanetScope Glacier velocity estimates.
- ❑Improve processing workflow, generate seasonal glacier velocity observations for high-priority sites, integrate velocity measurements from WorldView time-series.
- ❑Document and release open-source workflows and derived data products.

Acknowledgment: Support and discussions with Engineers at Planet Labs is deeply acknowledged. Special thanks are due to Paris Good for her assistance and for setting up necessary discussions with the Engineering Team whenever required. Funding Support : NASA HIMAT (NNX16AQ88G), NASA FINESST (80NSSC19K1338). Data: NASA Commercial Data Buy (80NSSC18K1405). Computing Support: NASA HEC, Pangeo. Mental Support: Friends & Family.

High-End Computing Program