

Greenland Ice Sheet Ice Slab Expansion and Thickening

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Key Points:

- Ice slabs were already present in the early 2000s in southwest, central-west and north Greenland.
- Ice slabs expanded inland from 2002 to 2018 and thickened by top-down accretion and by accretion on their undersides.
- Near-surface ice layers support subsequent ice slab development.

15 Abstract

16 We use airborne accumulation radar data acquired over the Greenland Ice Sheet between 2002
17 and 2018 to identify changes in ice slab extent and thickness. We show that ice slabs several
18 metres thick were already present at least as early as 2002. Between 2012 and 2018, they
19 expanded 13,400-17,600 km² inland, or by 37-44%. Our results document that the extremely
20 warm summer of 2012 produced near-surface ice layers at higher elevations, enabling ice slabs
21 to develop in locations with only moderate melting in the following summers. With repeated
22 flights over a transect in southwest Greenland, we show that ice slabs can thicken from above
23 and on their undersides. Moderate melting primarily thickens ice slabs by top-down accretion,
24 while large melting events can also trigger ice accretion below the slabs.

25 Plain Language Summary

26 Above the equilibrium line elevation, seasonal snow is not entirely removed by summer melting.
27 As a result, firn - an interannual layer made of old snow and refrozen meltwater - builds up. Firn
28 holds the potential to buffer sea level rise by trapping liquid water within its pore space.
29 However, surface melting has increased in recent decades, making large quantities of water
30 available to percolate into the firn where it refreezes, eventually creating metres-thick ice slabs
31 that hinder future percolation. We mapped ice slabs in the subsurface firn (0-20m depth) by
32 using airborne radar surveys and show that they have expanded inland and thickened from 2002
33 to 2018. Once formed, ice slabs continue to thicken, even under moderate melt conditions.
34 Recent increases in the ice sheet's visible runoff area match well with the expansion of ice slabs,
35 so we conclude that ice slabs will be an important control on the future runoff area of the ice
36 sheet.

37 1 Introduction

38 In the 1990s, the mass balance of the Greenland Ice Sheet (GrIS) was close to equilibrium, but
39 has been negative for the last two decades (The IMBIE Team, 2020). Iceberg calving rates
40 increased (King et al., 2020; Rignot et al., 2008; The IMBIE Team, 2020) and the surface mass
41 balance (SMB) has decreased as a result of increasing melt and runoff (Enderlin et al., 2014;
42 Fettweis et al., 2017; The IMBIE Team, 2020; van den Broeke et al., 2016). Furthermore,
43 extremely warm summers such as in 2010, 2012, 2016 and 2019 (Mikkelsen et al., 2016;

44 Tedesco et al., 2011, 2013; Tedesco & Fettweis, 2020) triggered unprecedented surface melt
45 rates at high elevations (Hall et al., 2013; Nghiem et al., 2012) and exceptionally high volumes
46 of runoff (Mikkelsen et al., 2016; van Angelen et al., 2014).

47 Recent increases in surface melting have densified the subsurface firn (Machguth et al., 2016;
48 Mikkelsen et al., 2016; van Angelen et al., 2014). Firn is found above the equilibrium line and
49 consists of interannual snowpack, the density of which increases by compaction through burial
50 but also due to percolation and refreezing of surface meltwater (Braithwaite et al., 1994; Brown
51 et al., 2011; Pfeffer & Humphrey, 1998). Firn has the potential to trap and store meltwater within
52 its pore space, thereby buffering the GrIS contribution to sea level rise (Harper et al., 2012;
53 Pfeffer et al., 1991).

54 In the percolation zone, where surface melt rates are substantial but usually do not deplete the
55 seasonal snow completely, the fate of meltwater varies mainly with annual snowfall. Where
56 snowfall rates are high ($\sim 1000 \pm 400$ mm w.e. per year), mostly in southeast and south
57 Greenland, liquid water percolates to a depth where it forms perennial firn aquifers (Forster et
58 al., 2014; Miège et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2022). Conversely, in regions where accumulation
59 rates are lower and which have recently experienced significant melting, ice slabs several metres
60 thick can form – mostly along the west, north and northeast of the GrIS (MacFerrin et al., 2019;
61 Miller et al., 2022). In these regions, increased meltwater percolation during several successive
62 summers fused centimeters-scale ice lenses into increasingly contiguous ice layers tens of
63 centimeters thick and eventually metres-thick slabs, thereby decreasing the firn's permeability
64 (de la Peña et al., 2015; Vandecrux et al., 2019). Ice slabs form an aquitard, preventing most
65 subsequent meltwater from reaching the relict pore space below (MacFerrin et al., 2019;
66 Machguth et al., 2016).

67 Ice slabs favour the development of surface streams in the high percolation zone (Machguth et
68 al., 2016; Mikkelsen et al., 2016; Tedstone & Machguth, 2022). The area of the ice sheet drained
69 by surface rivers increased by 29% between 1985 and 2020, corresponding strongly with the
70 locations of ice slabs mapped previously and suggesting that 5-10% of recent ice-sheet-wide
71 mass losses originated from these newly densified parts of the accumulation zone (Tedstone &
72 Machguth, 2022). This underlines that it is essential to understand firn densification and ice slab

73 development for inclusion in ice sheet mass balance models that are used for projections of
74 future ice sheet runoff (de la Peña et al., 2015). Despite their emerging importance to future
75 runoff magnitude, ice slabs have only been mapped over a short time period: with accumulation
76 radar from 2010 to 2014 (MacFerrin et al., 2019), and through a proxy approach with satellite
77 microwave radiometry from 2015 to 2019 (Miller et al., 2022). Here we investigate changes in
78 the extent and thickness of ice slabs using airborne radar observations acquired during spring-
79 time campaigns between 2002 and 2018.

80 **2 Data and Methods**

81 To map ice layer and slab locations in 2002-03 we used data collected by 600-900 MHz
82 accumulation radar (Kanagaratnam et al., 2004; Lewis, 2010). To examine changing ice content
83 during 2010-18, we used the 550-900 MHz accumulation radar (Carl et al., 2011; CReSIS, 2021;
84 Rodriguez-Morales et al., 2010) ; the 2010-14 data that we processed are identical to those used
85 by MacFerrin et al. (2019).

86 Data acquired during 2002-03 were detrended in the logarithmic domain by the provider, so they
87 have virtually no radiometric information (J. Paden, personal communication 2020). This means
88 they are only useful for layer tracking. Nevertheless, the radiometric variability of the signal is
89 large enough to enable manual ice identification (Text S1). For radargrams acquired between
90 2010 and 2018, we developed a semi-automated approach based on MacFerrin et al. (2019) (Text
91 S2). In brief, to prepare the radargrams we picked the ice sheet surface, corrected for the roll of
92 the aircraft, removed the impact of varying atmospheric conditions by subtracting the average
93 surface signal strength, and applied a correction for depth attenuation.

94 We aimed to detect changes sub-surface ice thickness through time. MacFerrin et al. (2019) used
95 a normalised threshold to detect ice content, but we found that this yielded strong differences
96 between co-located radargrams over successive years (Text S2). Instead, we examined a range of
97 radar signal strengths extracted from a “reference” radargram as thresholds to discriminate
98 between porous firn and ice content in the uppermost 20 m. To determine the appropriate range
99 of radar signal strengths, we first manually digitised ice content in the reference radargram based
100 on comparison with in-situ ground penetrating radar measurements and firn cores acquired by
101 MacFerrin et al. (2019) (Fig. S3). Next, we used our reference radargram to determine the signal

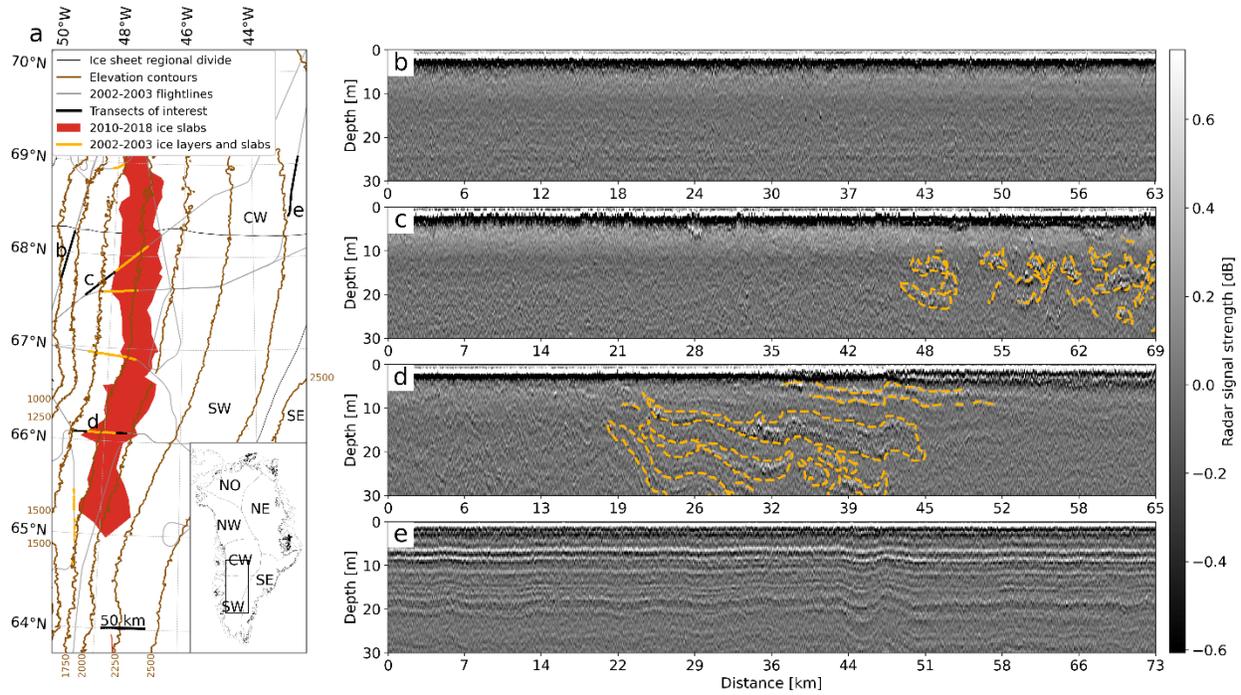
102 return strength given by (a) ice content versus (b) porous firn. The signal distributions of ice
103 content and porous firn partially overlap (Fig. S4). Following a sensitivity analysis (Text S2), we
104 chose lower and upper signal strength thresholds which correspond to the minimum and
105 maximum likely ice content, respectively. The producer's accuracy (overall accuracy) in
106 detecting ice content is 53% (86%) at the lower threshold and 73% (88%) at the higher threshold
107 (Tables S1, S2). For each radargram we also estimated the likelihood of ice content presence
108 between the lower and upper thresholds when ice is first detected. Thus, 100% ice likelihood
109 corresponds to detection at the lower threshold, while 50% corresponds to detection mid-way
110 between the lower and upper thresholds. Finally, following MacFerrin et al., (2019), we identify
111 ice slabs where radar-detected ice content is at least 1 m thick, and consider them to have a
112 maximum accumulation radar-detected thickness of 16 m. We use the term 'ice layers' to refer to
113 ice content less than ~1 m thick.

114 As a proxy for surface melting, we calculated Positive Degree Hour sum using a similar
115 approach to degree-day modelling (Hock, 2003), using in-situ 2 m air temperature measurements
116 from 2009 to 2017 at the automatic weather station KAN_U (Fausto et al., 2021). We summed
117 every positive 1-hour average temperature (i.e. above 0°C) for each year.

118 **3 Results**

119 3.1 Ice slab expansion from 2002 to 2018

120 Ice layers and slabs were present in 2002-03 (Fig. 1, 2a), up to several meters thick in SW
121 Greenland (Fig. 1a,c-d). Although the observations are relatively sparse (Fig. S7a), they were
122 also identified in the CW, in the vicinity of Sermeq Kujalleq's (Jakobshavn Isbrae) high
123 percolation zone. Ice layers and slabs were identified in the NO but not in the NW nor the NE,
124 although spatial coverage was limited in the latter regions.

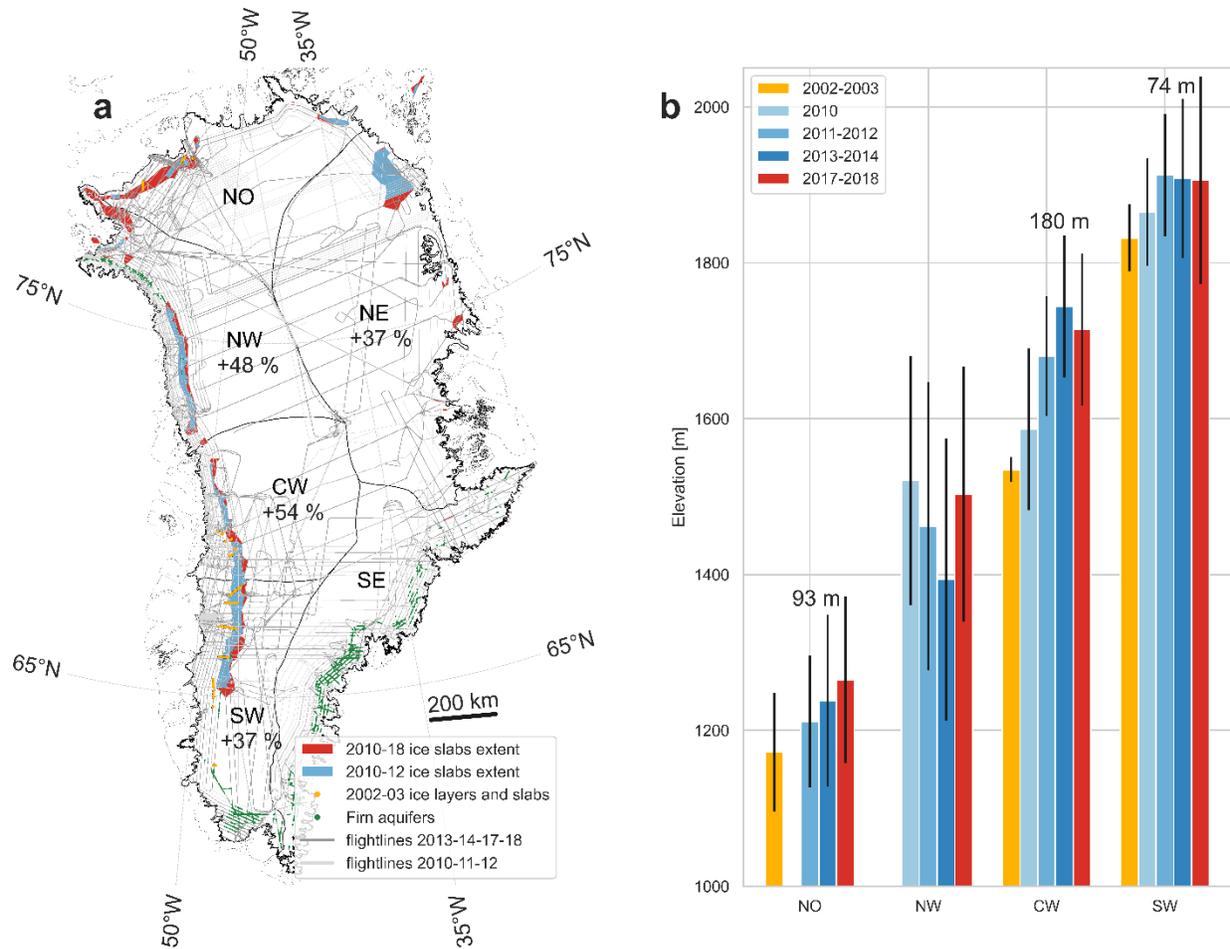


125

126 **Figure 1.** Ice layers and slabs in central and southwest Greenland in 2002-2003. (a) Regional
 127 zoom of radargram locations. Radargrams with ice layers/slabs identification overlaid (orange
 128 dashed lines) acquired from the (b) ablation zone (c-d) percolation zone and (e) dry snow zone.

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131

132 **Figure 2.** Ice slab extent from 2002 to 2018. (a) Ice layers and slabs in 2002-03 (orange), ice
 133 slab extent in 2010-12 (blue) and 2010-18 (red), firn aquifers in 2010-2014 (Miège et al., 2016)
 134 (green). Ice slab extents are derived from multiple flight lines (Fig. S8). Flight lines used for
 135 identification of 2010-2018 ice slabs (light grey: 2010-12, dark grey: 2013-18). Percentages
 136 indicate the upglacier expansion of ice slab extent in 2017-2018 with respect to 2010-12. (b)
 137 Maximum ice slab elevation (coloured bars) +/- 1 standard deviation (black bars) in each region.
 138 Numbers indicate the change in maximum ice slab elevation between 2002-03 and 2017-18.
 139 Elevations are above WGS84 ellipsoid. Maximum elevation changes in the NE, are omitted, as
 140 well as extent change in the NO and north of the NW as there was insufficient overlap in flight
 141 lines between the different periods (Fig. S7a-e).

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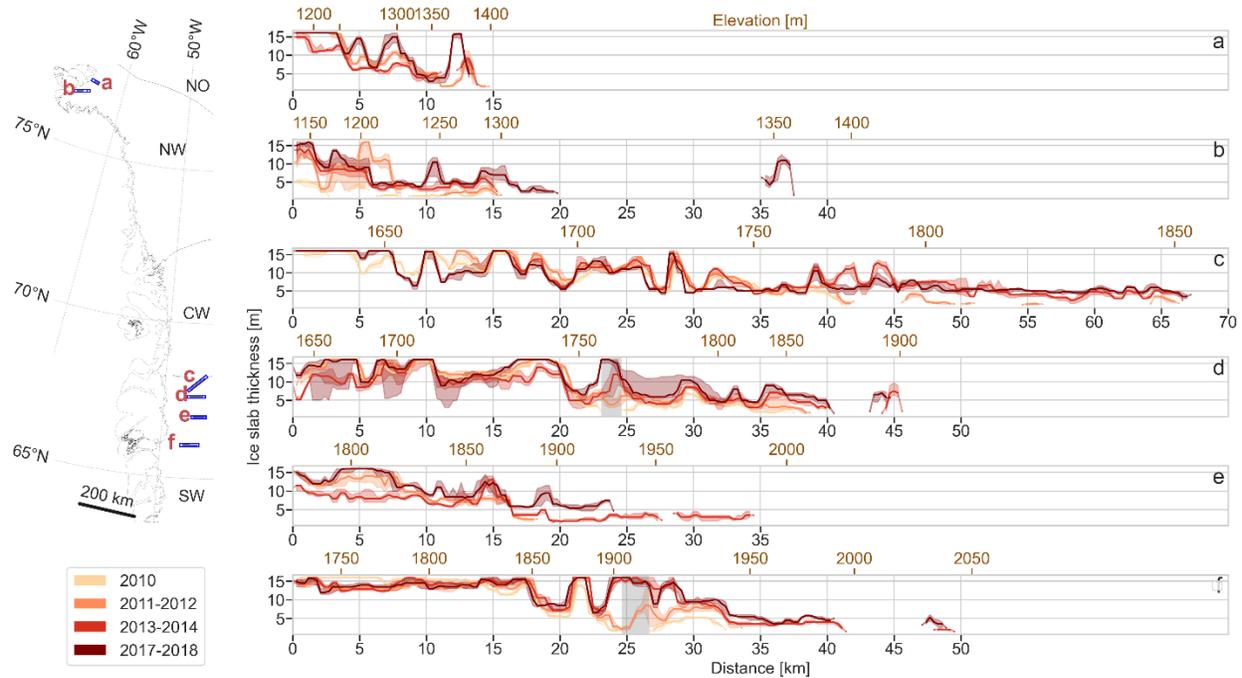
143 Considering the extents of our slab retrievals (Figs. 2a, S8), ice slabs occupied over 60,400-
144 73,500 km^2 (low-high bounds) in 2018, consistent with 2015-2019 ice slabs retrievals extending
145 over 76,000 km^2 using satellite microwave radiometry by Miller et al., (2022). Except in the
146 southern part of SW Greenland, we did not identify any entirely new ice slabs in either 2002-03
147 or 2017-18 compared to the 2010-14 mapping performed by MacFerrin et al., (2019) (Fig. S8).

148 We examined inland expansion between 2010-12 and 2017-18 (Fig. 2a). We use 2010-12
149 because there is good spatial coverage in 2011-12 supported by complementary coverage in 2010
150 (Fig. S7b-e). We estimate that the ice slab area increased from 2010-12 to 2017-18 by 37% in the
151 NE and the SW, 48% in the NW, and 54% in the CW. We also calculated the maximum ice slab
152 elevation in each period by picking the maximum elevation in 10 km-wide boxes, then
153 calculating the median value in each region. This showed that the increase in area was driven by
154 ice slab expansion to higher elevations throughout the west coast (Figs. 2b, S8), in agreement
155 with the upslope expansion of ice slabs identified by Miller et al., (2022).

156 3.2 Ice slab thickening

157 The accumulation radar used between 2010 and 2018 has a vertical resolution of 65 cm in snow
158 and firn (Rodriguez-Morales et al., 2014), enabling the examination of changes in ice slab
159 thickness along repeated radar survey lines. We focus on six transects which had repeated radar
160 surveys within tens to hundreds of metres of each other (Fig. 3) and differentiate between three
161 stages of ice slab change between 2010 and 2018: (i) initiation (i.e. appearance of a ~meter-thick
162 slab), (ii) development (i.e. significant thickening of existing ice slab) and (iii) well-developed
163 (i.e. already at least 10 m thick) (Text S3, Fig. S5). Ice content increased between 2010 and 2018
164 along all the transects. While there were no major thickness changes where well-developed ice
165 slabs were already present in 2010 (e.g. Fig. 3f from 0 to 23 km), we observed development of
166 thinner ice slabs. On transect A, ice content at 11-13 km increased by 13.5 m between 2011-12
167 and 2017-18. On transect B, the slab at 8-15 km thickened from less than 2 m in 2010 to roughly
168 5 m by 2017-18.

169



170

171 **Figure 3.** Ice slab thickness over time. Ice thickness derived from our upper ice content detection
 172 threshold (quantile 0.79). For each transect, the data were aggregated from the start of the
 173 transect into 300 m bins, smoothed with a 900 m rolling median. Median in bold, interquartile
 174 range denoted by shading.

175 Previously discontinuous ice slabs merged laterally over time (Fig. 3b-d,f). On transect C, a 5 to
 176 10 m-thick ice slab developed above the 2010 upper limit (at 41 km) by 2013-14, fusing several
 177 previously thinner and isolated areas of ice slab. Consequently, the upper limit of ice slabs
 178 expanded inland by 26 km from 2010 to 2017. On transect D (Fig. 3d), the ice-free section in
 179 between 23-24.5 km (grey shading) saw initial ice slab generation during summer 2010. This
 180 area developed to 16 m by 2018, filling the gap between two previously unconnected slabs and
 181 expanding the continuous ice slab by 17.4 km. Similar behaviour is apparent in transect F (Fig.
 182 3f grey shading).

183 To examine ice slab initiation and thickening in more detail, we examined radargrams along a
 184 transect with good repeat radar coverage near to the KAN_U weather station at which
 185 meteorological measurements have been made continuously since 2009 (Fig. 4). No radar data
 186 were acquired in this area during 2002-03, but radargrams acquired in the nearby area during

187 2010 and 2011 show sub-surface decimeters to meters-thick ice content (Fig. S9a-b). 2014 and
188 2017 radargrams are offset by several hundreds of meters from 2012, 2013 and 2018 radargrams
189 (900 m at 13.8 km, 1700 m at 40 km, Fig. 4a). The ice content can vary significantly between
190 non-perfectly overlapping transects. For example, the ice content between 13.8 and 15.6 km is
191 ~59% less in the 2014 retrieval compared to 2013 (Fig. 4b-c). Nonetheless, we still detected
192 overall thickening through time (Figs. 4d, S9h). Between 2012 and 2018, the ice thickened
193 between 0 and 13.8 km (+9%), increased substantially between 13.8 and 17.7 km (+43%), and a
194 new ice slab developed from 18.5 km.

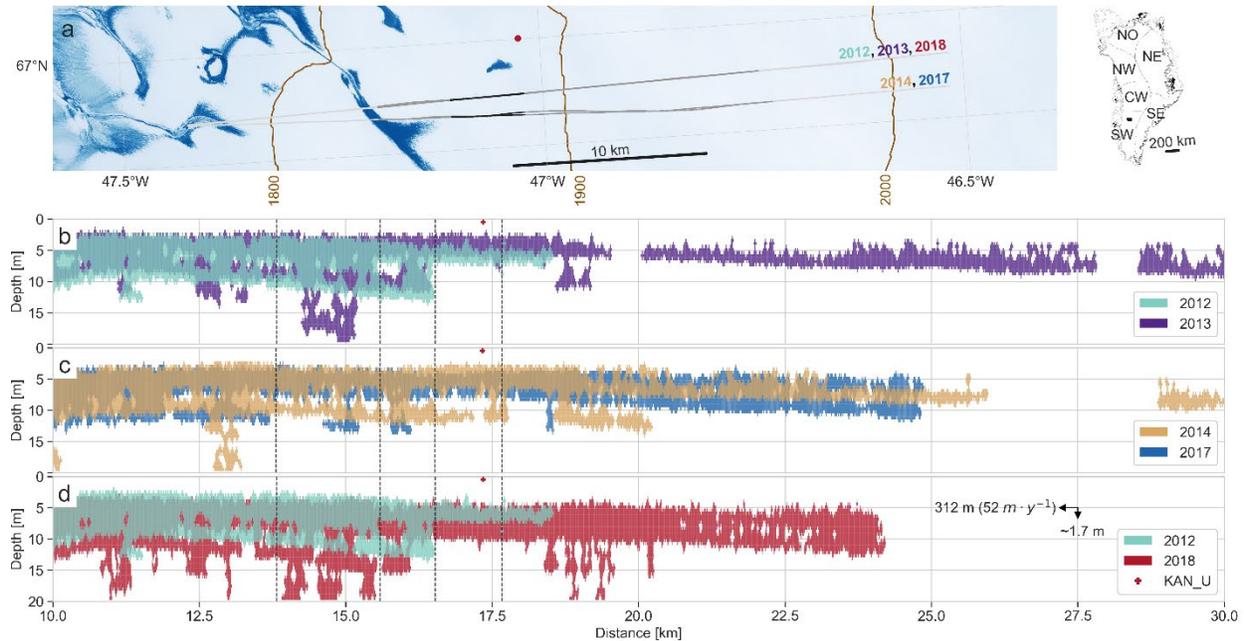
195 To relate the changes in ice thickness to the potential for meltwater percolation and refreezing,
196 we used total annual Positive Degree Hours (PDH) as a first-order estimate of summer melting
197 (Fig. S6). Following the extreme melt-year of 2012 with 1273 °C PDH, ice content between 13.8
198 and 17.7 km increased by 4,576 m² (19 %) from spring 2012 to spring 2013. From summer 2013
199 to 2017 there were 2233 °C PDH – 175% of 2012 – yet ice content increased by only 5,738 m²
200 between spring 2013 and spring 2018, equivalent to 25 % more ice content formation than 2012
201 alone.

202 We observed that ice slabs can thicken by ice accretion (i) on top of existing ice content versus
203 (ii) beneath. Considering top-down accretion, between 16.5 to 17.7 km there was 2.9 m
204 thickening from above between 2012 and 2018 (Fig. 4d); the bottom of the slab deepened by 3 m
205 with respect to the surface due to gradual burial (Text S4). Directly beneath KAN_U, 0.8 m ice
206 was added to the top of the ice slab due to high PDH in summer 2012 (Fig. 4b), and 0.6 m during
207 summer 2013 (Figs. 4b-c, S9h), even though the 2013 PDH was only 30% of the 2012 PDH (Fig.
208 S6). The subsequent 2.5 m of top-down thickening between 2014 and 2018 occurred during only
209 moderate melting in 2014 and 2016 and limited melting in 2015 and 2017 (Figs. 4c-d, S6, S9e-
210 h). There is further evidence of accretion on top of existing ice slabs in transects C-F (Fig. S10).

211 Between 13.8 and 15.6 km there was ~4 m of thickening predominantly below the slab between
212 2012 and 2018 (Fig. 4b,d). This was generated by ~1.5 m of accretion predominantly below the
213 existing ice slab due to summer 2012 (Fig. 4b), and a further ~2.5 m of accretion during 2014-
214 2017 split between thickening from above and below (Figs. 4b,d, S9d,g). We also observed
215 localized accretion below existing ice slabs in transects A, B and E (Fig. S10).

216 Ice slab expansion to higher elevations predominantly occurred through accretion on top of
 217 existing near-surface ice layers. At 2012's upper ice slab boundary (18.5 km), a ~1 m layer grew
 218 by spring 2013, subsequently thickening to 6 m by 2018 and yielding 5.7 km of inland slab
 219 expansion (Fig. 4d). Conversely, from ~25 km onwards the near-surface ice layer identified in
 220 spring 2013 (Fig. 4b) was buried by subsequent accumulation (Fig. 4d).

221



222

223 **Figure 4.** Ice thickness change through time along a transect close to KAN_U. (a) Near-infrared
 224 (band 8) Sentinel-2 image acquired on August 23rd, 2021, complete radargram extent (light
 225 grey), radargram extent (dark grey) shown in panels b-d, ~4km transect of interest (black),
 226 location of KAN_U (red dot). (b-d) Maximum likely ice content between different repeat
 227 radargrams. The dashed vertical lines delineate specific areas discussed in the text. In panel d,
 228 the vertical arrow illustrates burial from 2013 to 2017 due to firn replenishment; the horizontal
 229 arrow illustrates the lateral movement of the ice from 2012 to 2018 (Text S4).

230 4 Discussion

231 4.1 Mechanisms of ice slab formation and thickening

232 We identify three principal mechanisms of ice slab formation and thickening. (i) Meltwater
233 percolation and refreezing generates initial ice layers in porous firn. Then, accretion of ice by
234 meltwater refreezing proceeds (ii) on top of, and/or (iii) beneath pre-existing ice layers.

235 In the data presented in Fig. 4, mechanism (i) was responsible for the initial generation of a 3 m-
236 thick near-surface contiguous ice slab by the fusing of pre-existing discontinuous ice layers in
237 porous firn from 18.5 km onwards during summer 2012. Culberg et al. (2021) and de la Peña et
238 al. (2015) similarly showed that the initiation of near-surface ice layers can occur within a single
239 extremely warm summer.

240 Radar observations can differentiate between subsequent thickening by accretion (ii) on top of,
241 and (iii) below existing ice content. We interpret that unexceptional but sustained melting
242 conditions such as in 2014 or 2016 predominantly cause thickening by accretion on top of pre-
243 existing ice slabs (Figs. 4c, S6, S9c-g). Machguth et al., (2016) also evidenced top-down ice
244 accretion due to the 2013 and 2014 moderate melt summers by comparing 2015 and 2013 cores.
245 Hence, once ice slabs form, they thicken even in moderate melt years.

246 Accretion below existing ice slabs (Fig. 4b,d) was primarily associated with the large PDH sum
247 during summer 2012 (Fig. S6). We propose that abundant meltwater - which may have
248 originated from higher elevations (Clerx et al., 2022) - was able to exploit local areas of higher
249 permeability. Previous observations show that deep percolation (> 10 m) can occur in firn
250 without homogeneous wetting front advance (Humphrey et al., 2012; Machguth et al., 2016;
251 Samimi et al., 2020). However, these processes are less likely to occur through several meters
252 thick ice slabs. In northwest Greenland, Culberg et al., (2022) found that meltwater associated
253 with visible runoff features probably exploits fractures to penetrate through the ice slab and
254 refreeze underneath. We find multiple lines of evidence which support this process further south.
255 First, crevasses have been observed at high elevations in the percolation zone of central-west
256 Greenland (Colgan et al., 2016), providing paths for meltwater to flow vertically. Second, the
257 accretion of ice beneath ice slabs observed downstream of KAN_U (Fig. 4) is associated with
258 meltwater ponding in a slush field (Fig. S11). Third, sudden firn warming at 5 m depth at

259 KAN_U in September 2012 strongly supports abrupt meltwater penetration through a 3 m thick
260 ice slab, followed by gradual cooling through winter indicative of refreezing (Machguth et al.,
261 (2016) Figs. S4 and S5a). Finally, firn cores acquired in 2012 and 2013 show ice accretion at a
262 depth of 5 m in-between existing ice slabs (Machguth et al., (2016) Fig. S4c).

263 4.2 Changes in sub-surface firn and implications

264 Immediately above the current ice slab extent in SW Greenland, the firn is primed for further ice
265 slab development. Indeed, cores from Site J (2040 m asl) acquired in 1989 and 2017 clearly
266 show the merging of ice lenses into several ~1 m thick layers in the uppermost 12 m
267 (Rennermalm et al., 2021), and cores acquired at Dye-2 (2,120 m asl) in 1998 and 2013 tell a
268 similar story (Machguth et al., 2016). The increase in firn density and ice content is consistent
269 with recent warmer surface conditions (de la Peña et al., 2015).

270 Surface melting is projected to increase in the percolation zone (Fettweis et al., 2013; Franco et
271 al., 2013), and extreme summer melting events such as 2010 and 2012 are expected to become
272 more frequent (Bevis et al., 2019). Yet, radargrams indicate that the fate of the near-surface ice
273 layer generated in summer 2012 varied by elevation.

274 Towards the lower elevations of the ice layer that was mostly generated due to summer 2012
275 (from 18.5 km onwards), additional ice accreted, forming ice slabs by 2017-18 (Fig. 4).
276 Conversely, at higher elevations where melt was infrequent between 2013 and 2017 (Fig. S6),
277 the near-surface layer generated in 2012 was progressively buried to moderate depths, reducing
278 the likelihood that it will support ice slab growth in the future. The upper limit of the summer
279 2012 ice layer (Fig. S9d) is located 260 m away from the location of Core 3 (Rennermalm et al.,
280 2021). The later layer probably corresponds to the numerous ice layers found in the uppermost 9
281 m of Core 3 in 2013. By 2018, these ice layers had been buried and could no longer be identified
282 by radar (Fig. S9e-g), in agreement with ~3.5 m of firn replenishment identified by the redrilling
283 of Core 3 in 2019. This is consistent with Culberg et al. (2021), who showed that the 2012 near-
284 surface melt layer above 2600 m asl in central Greenland was initially located at 1 m deep, and
285 was still present in 2017 but had been buried to a depth of 5 m. Thus, the ability of near-surface
286 ice layers to support subsequent ice slab development is likely to depend on whether strong
287 melting occurs during several successive summers.

288 Considering recent sub-surface changes between 2013 and 2017, cores at KAN_U (Fig. 6a in
289 Rennermalm et al. (2021)) show that the top of the ice slab was at roughly the same depth in
290 2017 as 2013. However, the 2015 and 2016 cores showed some evidence of firn replenishment.
291 We suggest that this replenishment subsequently melted during summer 2016 (Fig. S6) and
292 refroze on top of the slab. Thus, the effect of isolated years of firn replenishment, which
293 temporarily bury an ice slab, can be easily erased by relatively moderate melting.

294 **5 Conclusions**

295 We interpreted accumulation radar data to show that ice slabs already existed in 2002-03 in SW,
296 CW and NO Greenland, which are most likely a result of increasing surface melting from the
297 mid-1990s onwards (van As et al., 2016). On an ice-sheet-wide basis we showed that ice slabs
298 expanded inland from 2012 to 2018 by 13,400-17,600 km², or 37-44%.

299 We identified two mechanisms by which ice slabs thicken: wide-spread ice accretion on top of
300 pre-existing ice slabs, and more localised ice accretion beneath pre-existing ice slabs. We
301 suggest that deep percolation through ice slabs takes place beneath ponded surface meltwater
302 features and exploits local fractures in otherwise near-impermeable ice slabs. Accretion below
303 pre-existing ice slabs is therefore more likely during extreme melt seasons, while more moderate
304 melt seasons predominantly result in top-down thickening.

305 Extremely warm summers such as 2012 can produce enough meltwater at higher elevations to
306 generate a near-surface ice layer on the order of at least a meter thick, forming the basis for
307 subsequent ice slab expansion via top-down ice accretion. Once formed, ice slabs continue to
308 thicken, even under moderate melting conditions.

309 We suggest that future increases in melting at higher elevations will trigger further ice slab
310 development, increasing the ice slab area non-linearly with elevation because of the non-linearity
311 of the hypsometry of the ice sheet (Bauer, 1955). The recent expansion of the visible runoff area
312 of the Greenland Ice Sheet (Tedstone & Machguth, 2022) is strongly linked with the expansion
313 of ice slabs (Fig. S12), so future increases in ice slab area are likely to further increase the area
314 which contributes runoff to the oceans.

315 **Acknowledgments**

316 This work was funded under the European Research Council award 818994 – CASSANDRA.
317 We acknowledge the use of data and data products from CReSIS generated with support from
318 the University of Kansas, NASA Operation IceBridge grant NNX16AH54G, NASA grant
319 NNX10AT68G, NSF grants ACI-1443054, OPP-1739003, and IIS-1838230, ANT-0424589,
320 Lilly Endowment Incorporated, and the Indiana METACyt Initiative. We thank P. Bednawrek
321 (University of Fribourg) for computational support.

322 **Open Research**

323 2002-2003 and 2010-2018 accumulation radar data (CReSIS, 2021) are available on the CReSIS
324 data repository (<https://data.cresis.ku.edu/data/accum/>). We used the ArcticDEM digital
325 elevation model at 100m resolution, which provides elevation above the WGS84 ellipsoid
326 (<https://www.pgc.umn.edu/data/arcticdem/>). The regional divisions of the GrIS are based on the
327 Greenland Ice Sheet drainage basins from Rignot & Mouginot (2012). Air temperatures at the
328 automatic weather station KAN_U station can be downloaded from
329 <https://doi.org/10.22008/promice/data/aws>. Sentinel 2 satellite images can be downloaded at
330 <https://scihub.copernicus.eu/dhus/#/home>. The scripts used to perform the analysis for this study
331 can be found at https://github.com/jullienn/changing_Greenland_iceslabs. Our ice slab dataset is
332 available at <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7505426>.

333 **Author contributions**

334 NJ, AT and HM designed the study. NK contributed to interpretation of the 2002-03 radargrams.
335 NJ developed the methodology for ice identification in 2010-18 data, with contributions from
336 VH, HM and AT. NJ carried out data processing, data analysis and interpretation. NJ and AT
337 wrote the manuscript based on comments from all co-authors.

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