Status of the International Height Reference Frame - IHRF

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Introduction

In July 2015, the IAG released a resolution for the "Definition and Realisation of a International Height Reference System (IHRS)". During the last four years different actions have been conducted to

- Establish a global reference network for the IHRS realisation: the International Height Reference Frame (IHRF)
- Evaluate different strategies for the determination of reference coordinates at the reference stations
- Identify required standards, conventions and procedures needed to ensure consistency between the definition (IHRS) and the realisation, the International Height Reference Frame (IHRF).

Introduction

Results presented here are a joint effort of

- GGOS JWG: Strategy for the realisation of the IHRS (chair: L Sánchez)
- IAG JWG 2.2.2: The 1 cm geoid experiment (chair: YM Wang)
- IAG SC 2.2: Methodology for geoid and physical height systems (chair: J Ågren)
- ICCT JSG 0.15: Regional geoid/quasi-geoid modelling - Theoretical framework for the sub-centimetre accuracy (chair: J Huang)
- IAG JWG 2.1.1: Establishment of a global absolute gravity reference system (chair: H Wziontek)
- IAG regional sub-commissions for reference frames and geoid modelling
- IAG Commission 2 – Gravity Field (chair R Pail)
- International Gravity Field Service – IGFS (chair R Barzaghi)
- GGOS Bureaus of Networks and Observations – GGOS-BNO (chair: M Pearlman) and Products and Standards – GGOS-BPS (chair: D Angermann)

Outline

- Definition of the International Height Reference System (IHRS)
- Some considerations for the determination of IHRS/IHRF coordinates
- Empirical experiments for a reliable determination of potential values
- International Height Reference Frame (IHRF): station selection for the reference network and first computations of reference coordinates
- Outlook

International Height Reference System (IHRS)
IAG Resolution No. 1, Prague, July 2015

1) Vertical coordinates are potential differences with respect to a conventionally fixed W_0 value:

$$C_P = C(P) = W_0 - W(P) = -\Delta W(P)$$

$$W_0 = const. = 62\,636\,853.4 \text{ m}^2\text{s}^{-2}$$

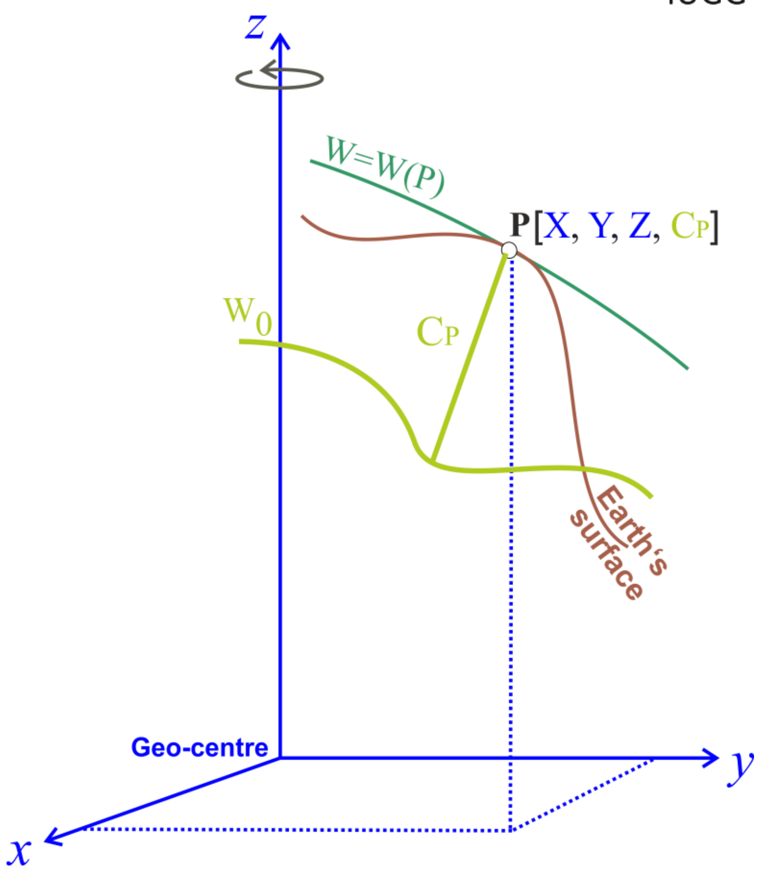
2) The position P is given in the ITRF

$$\mathbf{X}_P\ (X_P, Y_P, Z_P);\ \text{i.e., } W(P) = W(\mathbf{X}_P)$$

3) The estimation of $\mathbf{X}(P)$, $W(P)$ (or $C(P)$) includes their variation with time; i.e., $\dot{\mathbf{X}}(P)$, $\dot{W}(P)$ (or $\dot{C}(P)$).

4) Coordinates are given in mean-tide system / mean (zero) crust.

5) The unit of length is the meter and the unit of time is the second (SI).



See: Ihde J. et al.: *Definition and proposed realization of the International Height Reference System (IHRS)*. Surv Geophy 38(3), 549-570, 10.1007/s10712-017-9409-3, 2017

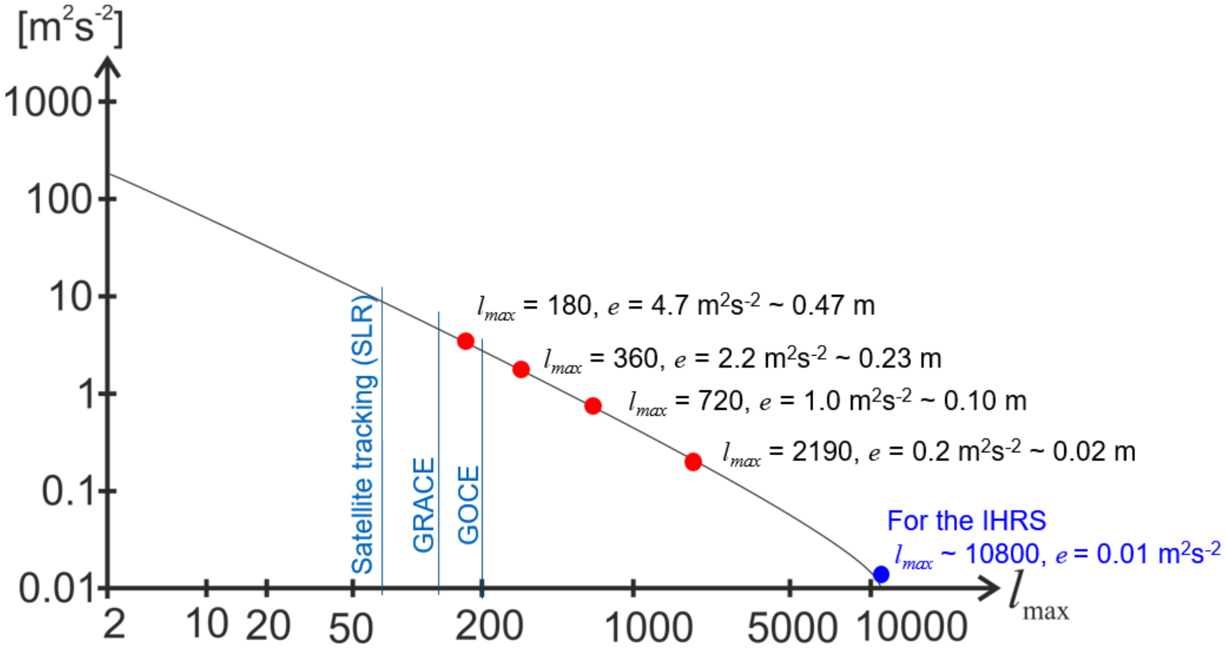
Basic considerations on the IHRS/IHRF coordinates

1) The IHRS/IHRF is
   - a combination of a geometric component given by the coordinate vector **X** in the ITRS/IHRF and
   - a physical component given by the determination of potential values W at **X**.
2) The determination of **X** follows the IERS Conventions and will not be further considered here.
3) According to the GGOS Terms of Reference, the expected accuracy of W is
   - Positions: $\approx \pm 3\times10^{-2}$ m^2s^{-2} (about 3 mm)
   - Velocities: $\approx \pm 3\times10^{-3}$ m^2s^{-2}/a (about 0.3 mm/a)
4) For the moment, our goal is $\pm 1\times10^{-1}$ m^2s^{-2} (about 1 cm)
5) The IHRS/IHRF coordinates include the determination of time variations. For the moment, we consider static coordinates only.

Possibilities for the determination of potential values

Global Gravity Models of high degree (GGM-HD) like the EGM2008 model (Pavlis et al., 2012, 2013) or the EIGEN-C series (e.g., Förste et al., 2012; 2014)

$$W(X,Y,Z)=\frac{GM}{r}\left[1+\sum_{n=1}^{\infty}\left(\frac{a}{r}\right)^{n}\sum_{m=0}^{n}\left[C_{nm}\cos m\lambda+S_{nm}\sin m\lambda\right]P_{nm(\cos\theta)}\right]+\frac{1}{2}\omega^{2}r^{2}\cos(90°-\theta)$$



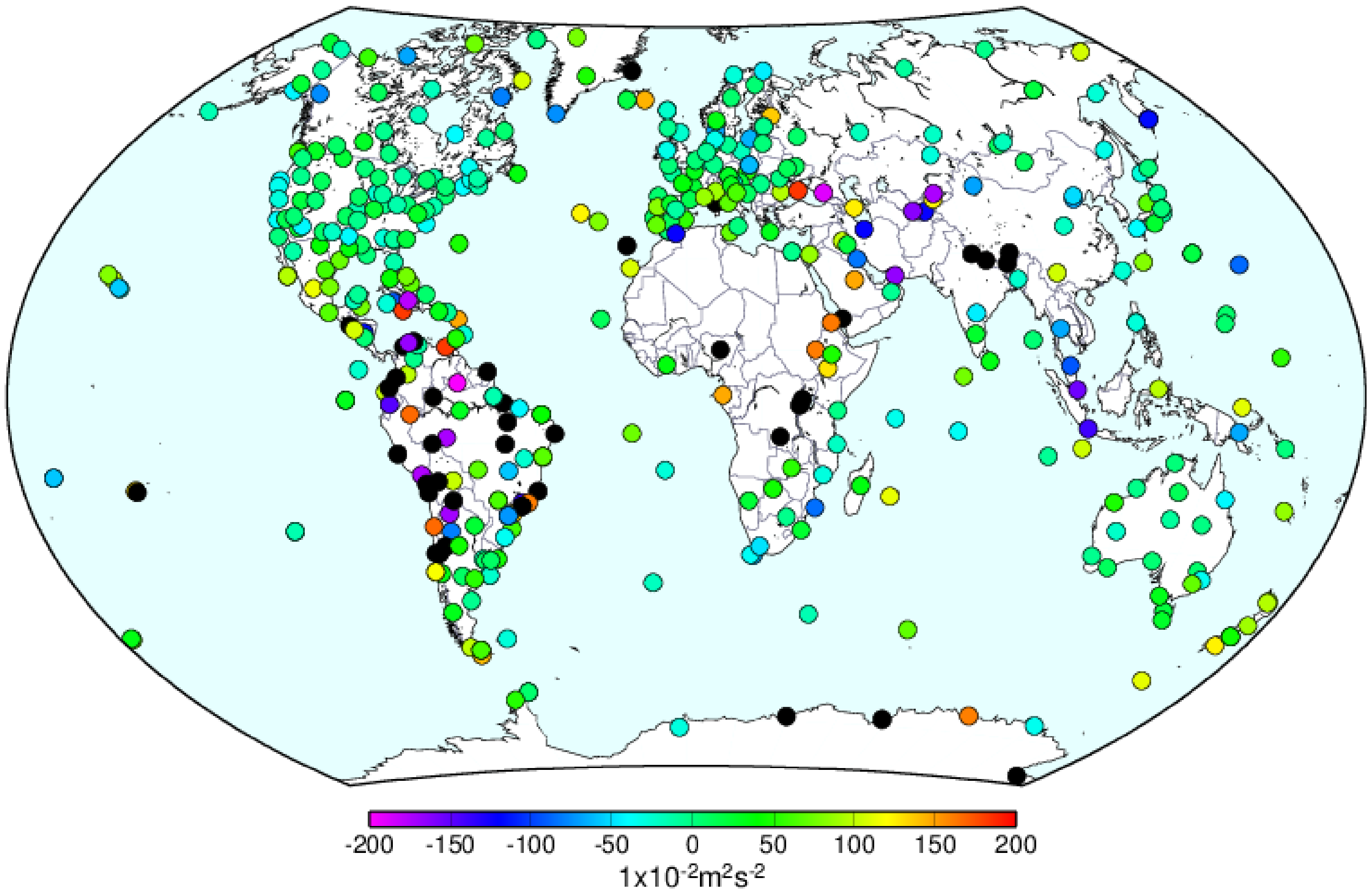
Omission error (e) of the GGM in [m^2s^{-2}] according to Tscherning and Rapp (1974), (l_{max} does not contain the full signal of the gravity field).

- Expected accuracy due to omission error (Rummel et al., 2014)
  - well surveyed regions: ±0.4 m^2s^{-2} to ±0.6 m^2s^{-2} (equivalent to ±4 cm to ±6 cm)
  - sparsely surveyed regions: from ±2 m^2s^{-2} ... ±4 m^2s^{-2} to ±10 m^2s^{-2} (equivalent to ±20 cm ... ±40 cm to ±1 m)
- The commission error has to be added to the omission error. The sum of both should be lower than ±0.03 m^2s^{-2}

Possibilities for the determination of potential values

Differences between the W_P values derived from EGM2008 (Pavlis et al. 2008) and EIGEN6C4 (Förste et al. 2014), both at n=2190

- Differences larger than ±200 x 10^{-2} m^2s^{-2} (~ ± 2 m)
- Desired accuracy for W_P: ±0.03 m^2s^{-2}



Possibilities for the determination of potential values

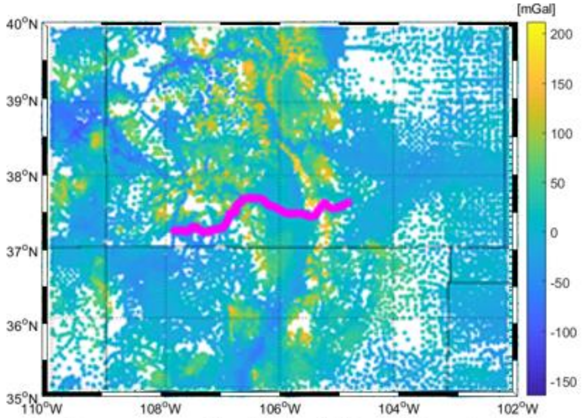
Gravity field modelling of high resolution

$$W_P = U_P + T_P \quad ; \qquad T_P = T_{P,satellite-only} + T_{P,residual} + T_{P,terrain}$$

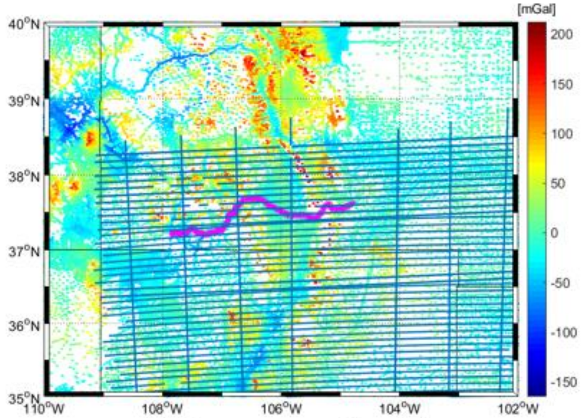
- GGM based on SLR, GRACE and GOCE are very precise (±1 ... ±2 cm @ 100 km)
- Mean omission error globally: ≈ ±45 cm
- Goal is to reduce these ±45 cm to ±1 cm (only possible using terrestrial gravity data and considering topographic effects)
- The potential values realising the IHRS coordinates must be determined at the reference stations; i.e., at the Earth's surface and not at the geoid
  - With Molodensky's approach, the determination of W_P is straightforward
  - With Stokes' approach, the potential values should be 'moved' to the Earth's surface using the same hypotheses applied to reduce the observed gravity values to the geoid
- The determination of T_P demands a series of approximations, which influence the results; i.e., different methodologies produce different potential values

Comparison of computation methods

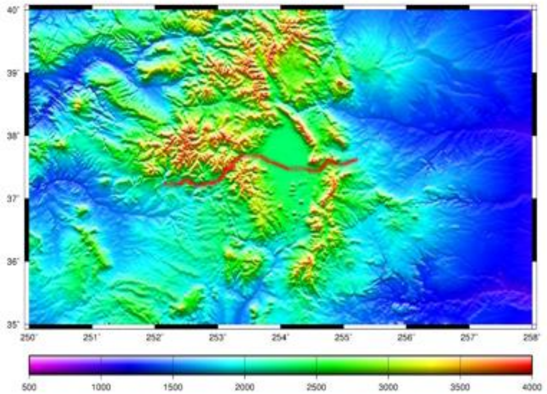
Colorado experiment: to compute geoid, quasi-geoid and potential values using exactly the same input data, a set of basic standards, and the own methodologies (software) of colleagues involved in the gravity field modelling.



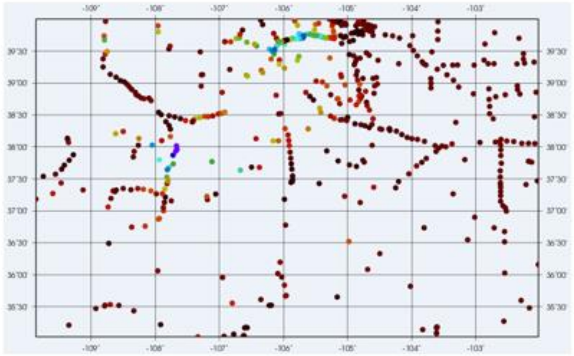
Surface gravity data (59,303 points)



Airborne gravity data
(41 lines E-W, 7 lines N-S)



Terrain model: SMRT V4.1


NGS *historical* GPS/levelling (510 points)

- Initiated in July 2017
- Data provided by US NGS
- Standards prepared by L Sánchez, J Ågren, J Huang, YM Wang, R Forsberg
- Three computations (two iterations) finished in June 2019
- Fifteen (final) contributing solutions
- Special Issue of the Journal of Geodesy with computation methods and comparison of geoid and quasi-geoid models (in preparation).

Colorado experiment: contributing solutions

Faculty of Engineering, Minia University, Egypt

İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi, Istambul, Turkey

Department of Geodesy and Surveying, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece

National Geodetic Survey, USA

Natural Resources Canada, Canada

Lantmäteriet, Swedish mapping, cadastral and land registration authority, Sweden

School of Earth and Planetary Sciences and The Institute for Geoscience Research, Curtin University, Australia

Escola Politécnica, Universidade de São Paulo; Centro de Estudos de Geodesia, Brazil

Deutsches Geodätisches Forschungsinstitut, Technische Universität München, Germany

Ingenieurinstitut für Astronomische und Physikalische Geodäsie, Technische Universität München, Germany

Chinese Academy of Surveying and Mapping, China

Politecnico de Milano, Italy

Faculty of Geodesy, University of Zagreb, Croatia - Research Institute of Geodesy, Topography and Cartography, Czech Republic

National Space Institute, Technical University of Denmark, Denmark

Geography and Crustal Dynamics Research Center, Geospatial Information Authority of Japan, Japan

Colorado experiment: summary of approaches and models

- Least squares modification of Stokes’ formula with additive corrections (2)
- Least squares modification of Stokes’ formula with additive corrections and biased Stokes’ kernel modification
- Stokes’ formula with Wong-Gore modification and 1D-FFT (2)
- Spherical radial basis functions
- Least squares collocation
- Fast collocation based on gravity gridded data
- Degree weighted Stokes’ integral
- Modified degree-banded Stokes‘ kernel (2)
- Spherical FFT with modified Wong-Core Stokes‘ kernel
- UNB Stokes-Helmert scheme
- UNB Stokes-Helmert scheme with hybrid-Meissl-Molodensky modified spheroidal Stokes‘ kernel
- NGS Molodensky approach, Spherical Harmonics Analysis (SHA)
- GGMs: GOCO05s, XGM2016, XGM2018, xGEOID17B, EIGEN-6C4, EGM2008
- Topographic effects based on SRTM V4.1, EARTH2014, COLH19M05, ERTM2160
- 12 solutions based on height anomalies, 3 solutions based on geoid undulations

Colorado experiment: comparison of potential values

1) The comparison is carried out at 223 GSVS17 marks (Geoid Slope Validation Survey 2017) selected by NGS

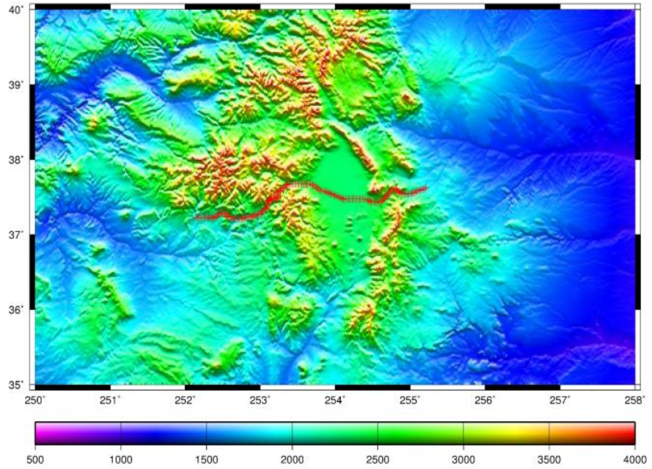
2) Participants in the experiment got φ, λ, h; levelling is not available (yet)

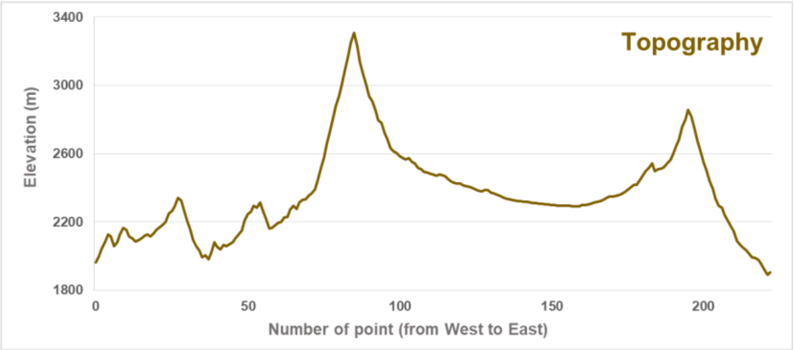
3) The potential values provided by the different solutions are converted to geopotential numbers with respect to the IHRS W_0 value

$$C(P) = W_0 - W(P) \quad ; \quad W_0 = 62\,636\,853.4 \text{ m}^2\text{s}^{-2}$$

4) and further transformed to normal heights (to see the differences in meters):

$$H^*(P) = C(P)/\gamma(P)$$

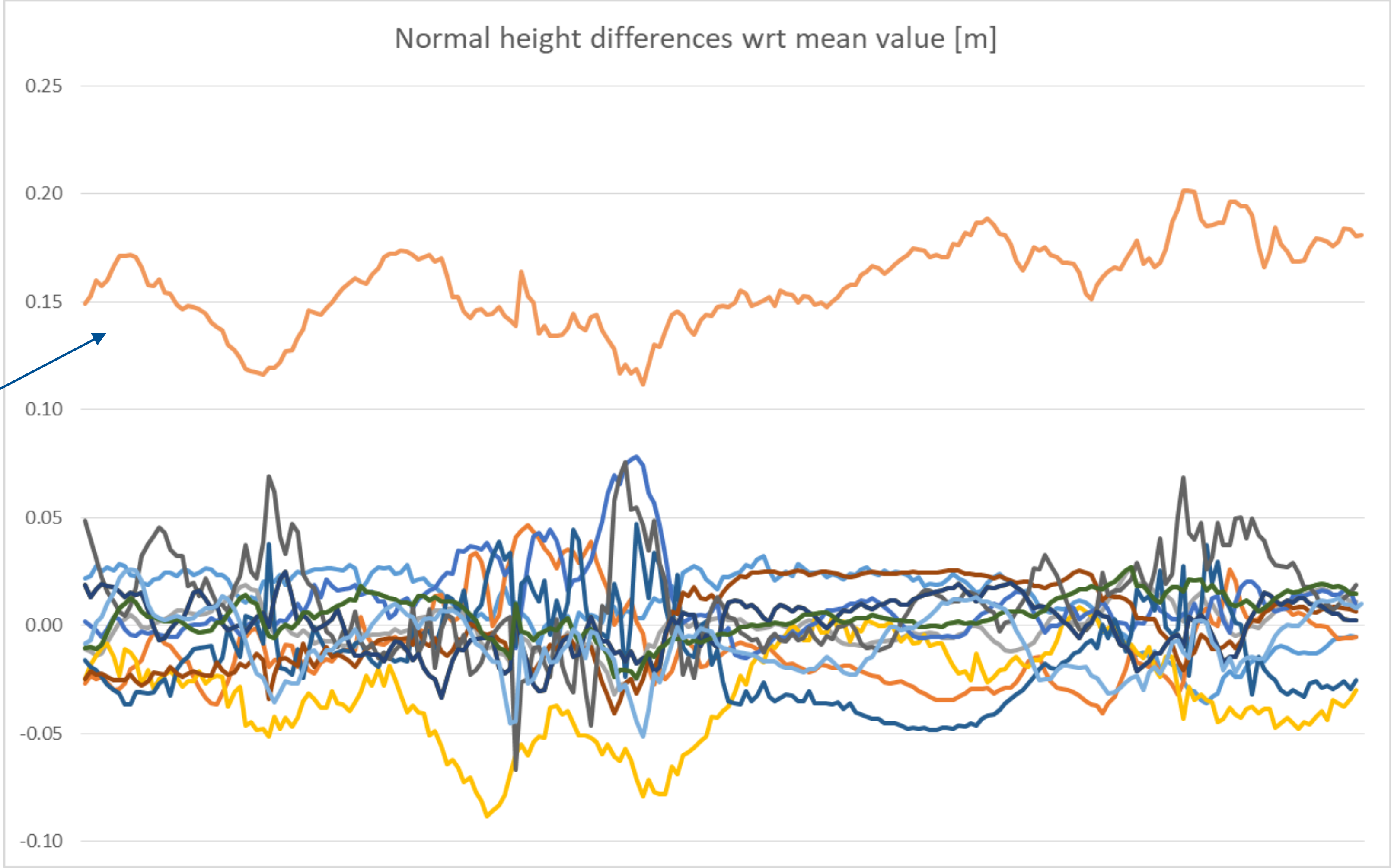


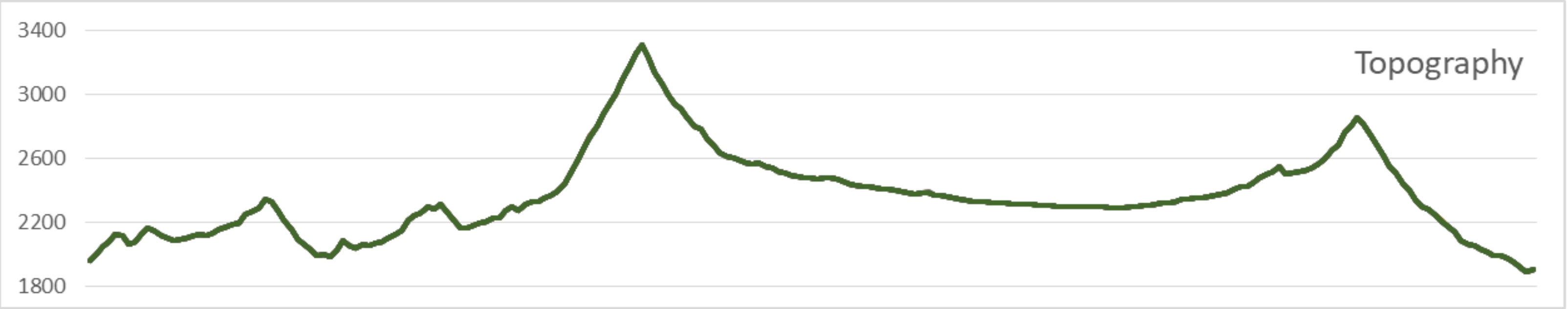


Colorado experiment: comparison of potential values

Normal height difference [cm]
(individual contribution – mean)

Outlier 1
Mean : 15.7 ± 1.9 cm
Range: 8.9 (11.2 ... 20.0)





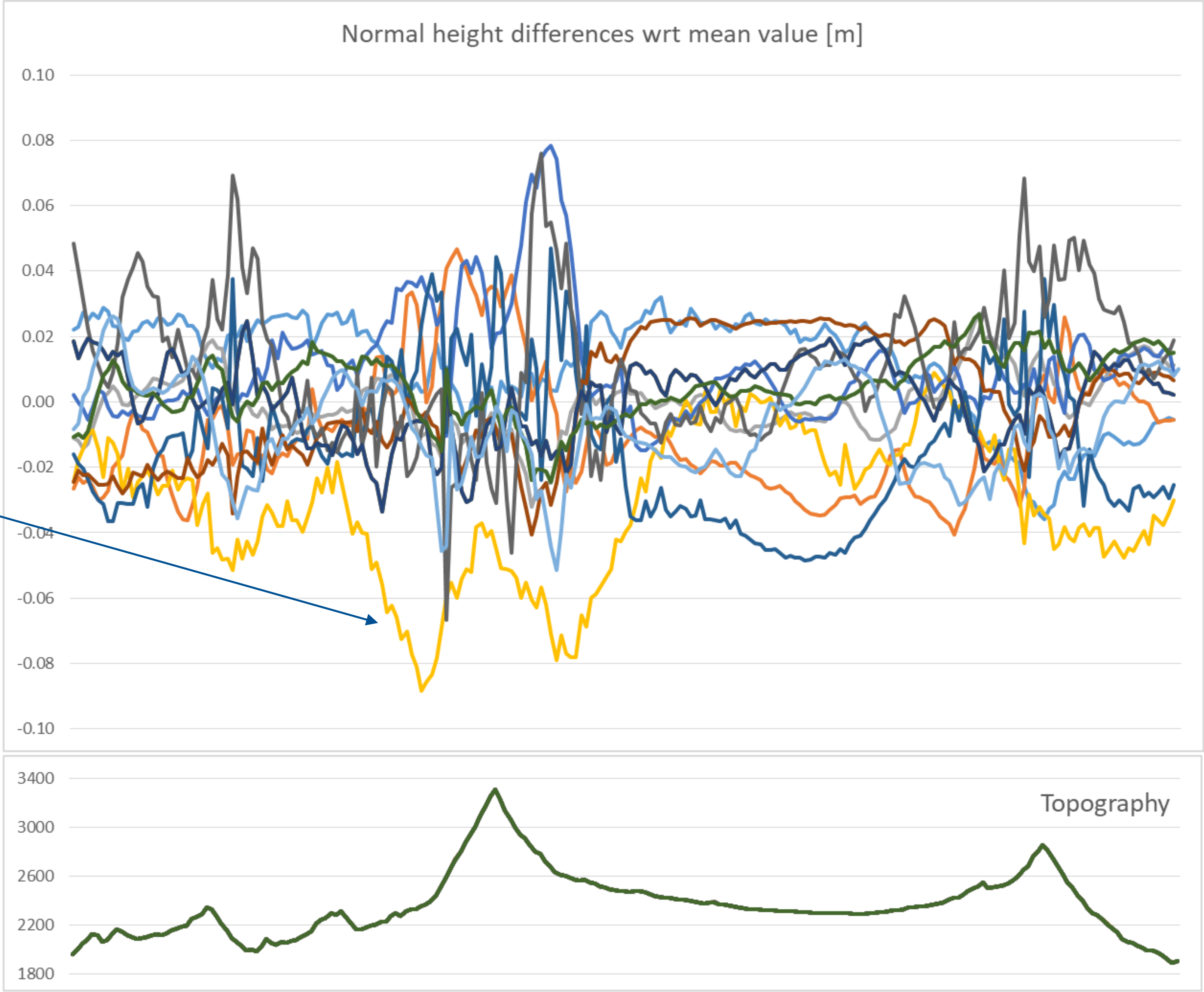
Zero-degree term: 17.85 cm

$$\zeta_0 = \frac{(GM_{GGM} - GM_{GRS80})}{r_P \cdot \gamma_Q} - \frac{\Delta W_0}{\gamma_Q}$$

Colorado experiment: comparison of potential values

Normal height difference [cm]
(individual contribution – mean)

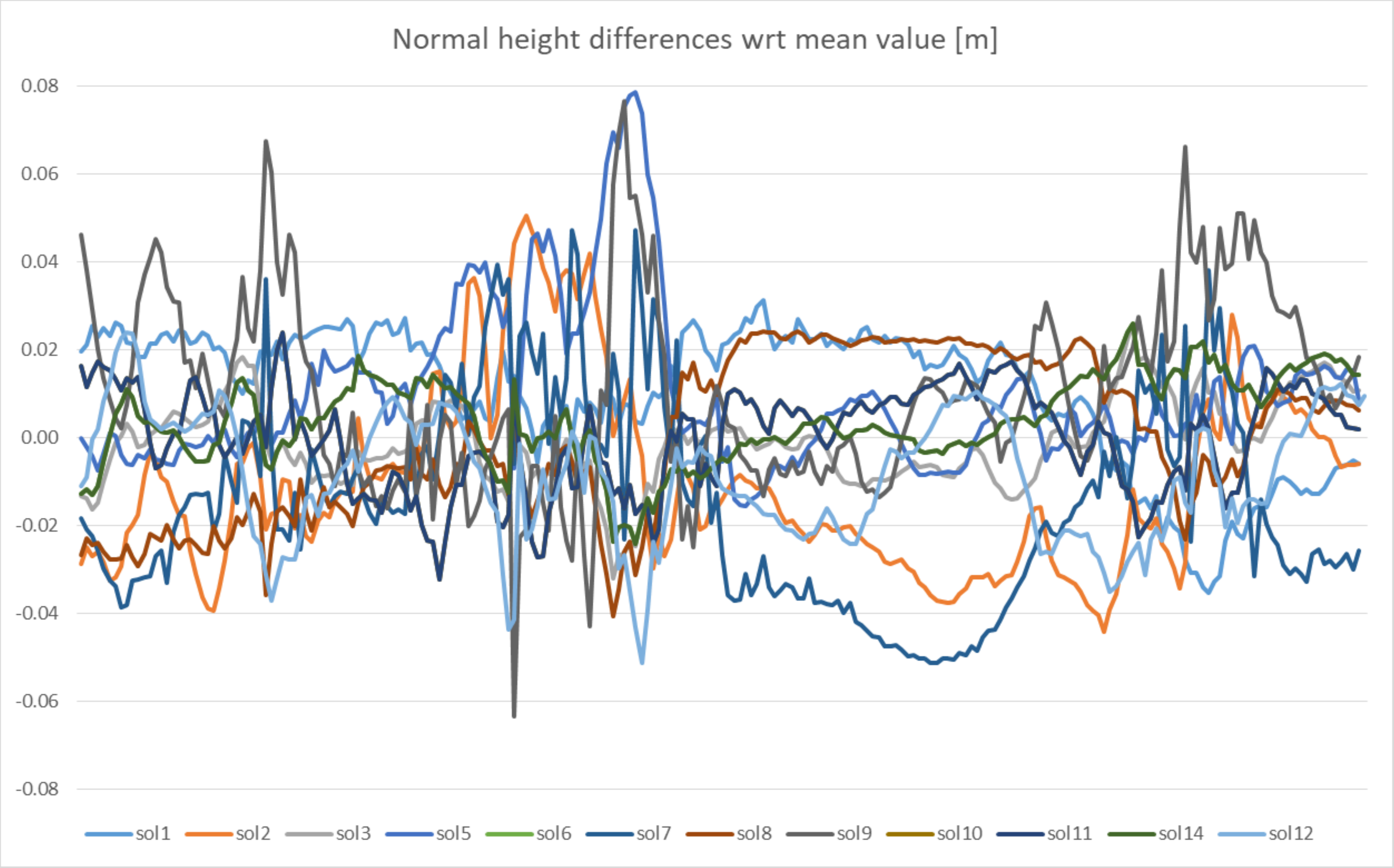
Outlier 2
Mean : -3.2 ± 2.1 cm
Range: 9.3 (-8.7 ... 0.6)

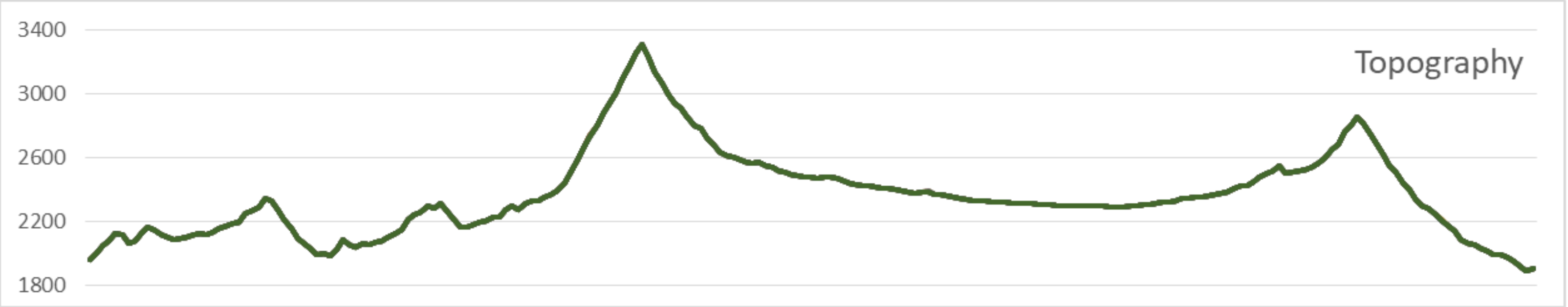


Colorado experiment: comparison of potential values

Normal height difference [cm]
(individual contribution – mean)

	Mean	±	STD	Range
sol1	1.0	±	1.6	6.6 (-3.5 ... 3.1)
sol2	-1.0	±	2.1	9.5 (-4.4 ... 5.1)
sol3	-0.1	±	1.0	5.8 (-3.2 ... 2.6)
sol5	1.0	±	1.8	9.4 (-1.6 ... 7.9)
sol6	0.4	±	1.0	5.3 (-2.7 ... 2.6)
sol7	-1.4	±	2.3	9.9 (-5.1 ... 4.7)
sol8	0.0	±	1.8	6.5 (-4.1 ... 2.4)
sol9	1.1	±	2.2	14.0 (-6.3 ... 7.7)
sol10	0.0	±	1.2	7.5 (-3.2 ... 4.3)
sol11	0.0	±	1.1	5.6 (-3.2 ... 2.4)
sol12	-0.9	±	1.4	7.5 (-5.1 ... 2.4)
sol14	0.4	±	1.0	5.0 (-2.4 ... 2.6)



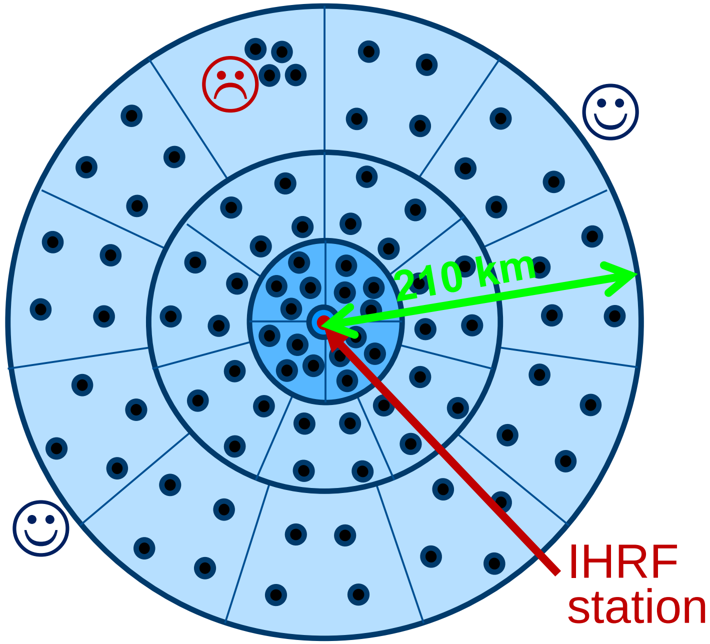


Learnings from the Colorado experiment

1) Twelve solutions agree within 1 cm to 2 cm in terms of standard deviation with respect to the mean value.
2) Results show the discrepancies between computation methods. Input data are assumed free of error. A proper error propagation analysis is still an open question.
3) We are waiting for the levelling results along the test profile to make comparisons with independent data.
4) Discrepancies between the different solutions are highly correlated with the topography
   - Handling of terrain gravity effects (model and strategy).
5) Difficulties reported by the colleagues contributing to the experiment
   - Processing of the airborne gravity data
   - Handling of the zero-degree term: handling of different GM values and U_0 and W_0.
6) A major confusion is the reference ellipsoid: which should be used GRS80 or WGS84?
   - Are we needing a new reference ellipsoid?

Learnings of the Colorado experiment

7) The GGM should be based at least on the combination of SLR, GRACE and GOCE data (n ≥ 200).
8) To get an accuracy of about 1 cm in the (quasi-)geoid, observed gravity values are required with a mean spatial resolution of about 4 km.
9) The availability of these data is a main requirement to select reference stations for the IHRF.



Template according to the gravity effect on the geoid ($\Delta g = 1 \cdot 10^{-6}$ ms^{-2} → 1 mm)		
Distance	Compartments	# of points flat/mountain
10 km	1	**4/8**
50 km	4	**20/30**
110 km	7	**30/45**
210 km	11	**50/75**
Sum	23	**104/158**

Criteria for the IHRF reference network configuration

1) Hierarchy:
   - A global network → worldwide distribution, including
   - A core network → to ensure sustainability and long term stability
   - Regional and national densifications → local accessibility

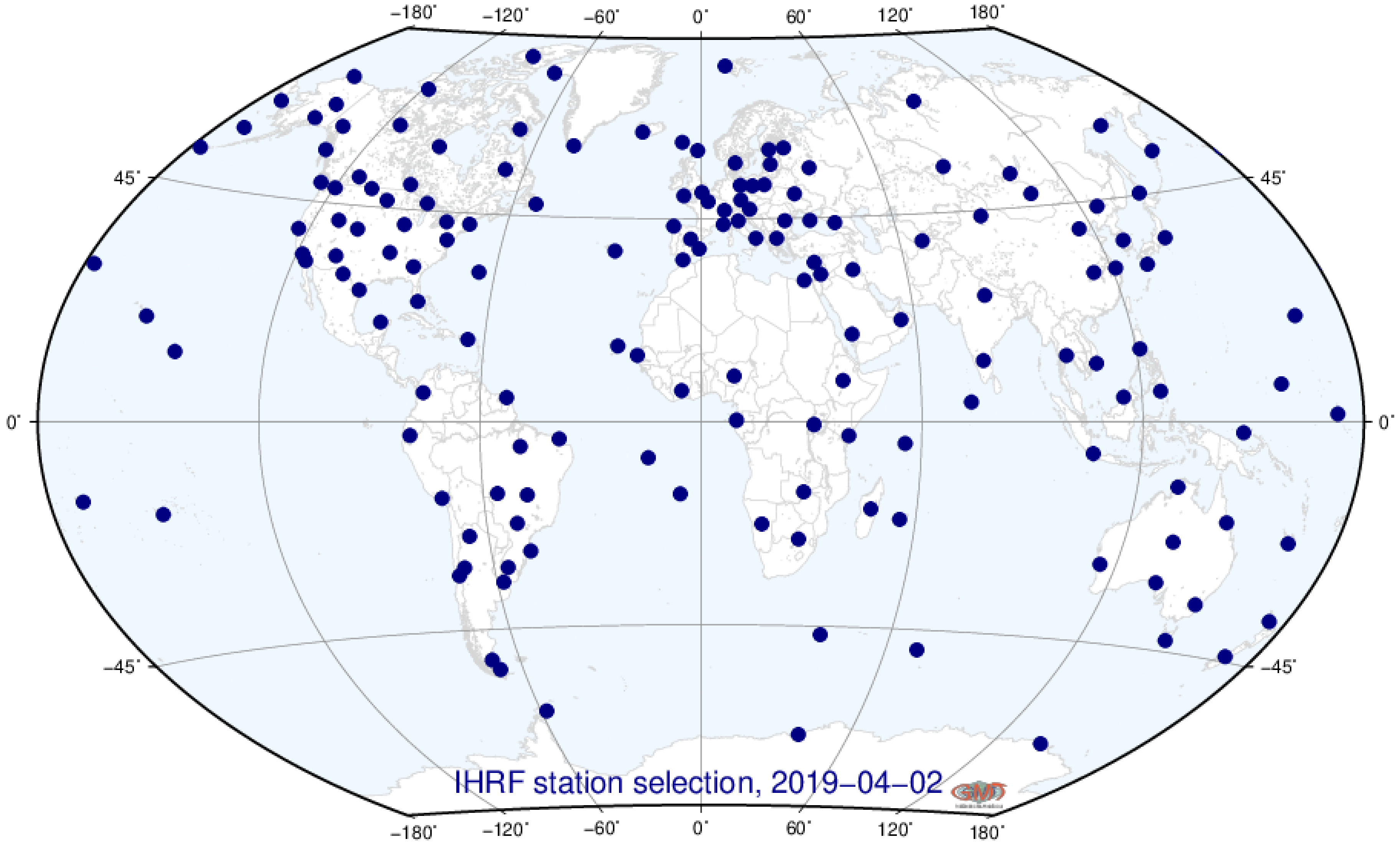
2) Collocated with:
   - fundamental geodetic observatories → connection between $\mathbf{X}$, W, $\mathbf{g}$ and time realisation (reference clocks) → to support the GGRF;
   - continuously operating reference stations → to detect deformations of the reference frame (preference for ITRF and regional reference stations, like SIRGAS, EPN, APREF, etc.);
   - reference tide gauges and national vertical networks → to facilitate the vertical datum unification;
   - reference stations of the new International Gravity Reference Frame - IGRF (see IAG Resolution 2, Prague 2015).

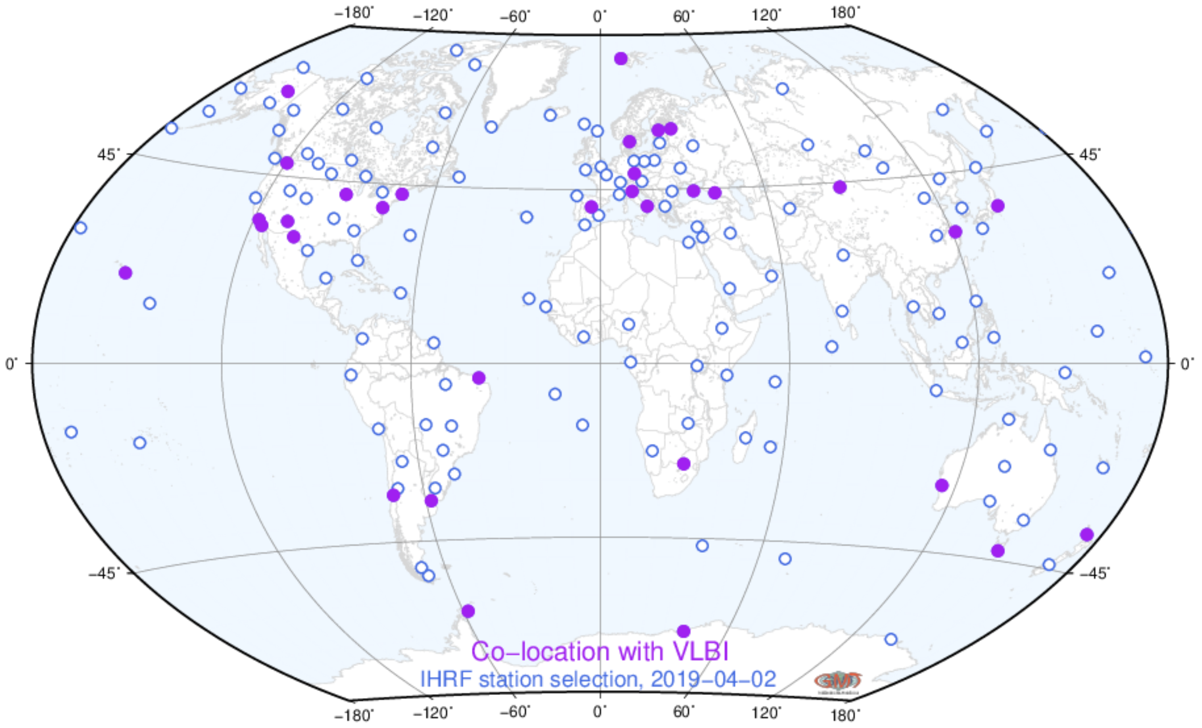
3) Main requirement: availability of terrestrial gravity data around the IHRS reference stations for high-resolution gravity field modelling (i.e., precise estimation of W).

Station selection

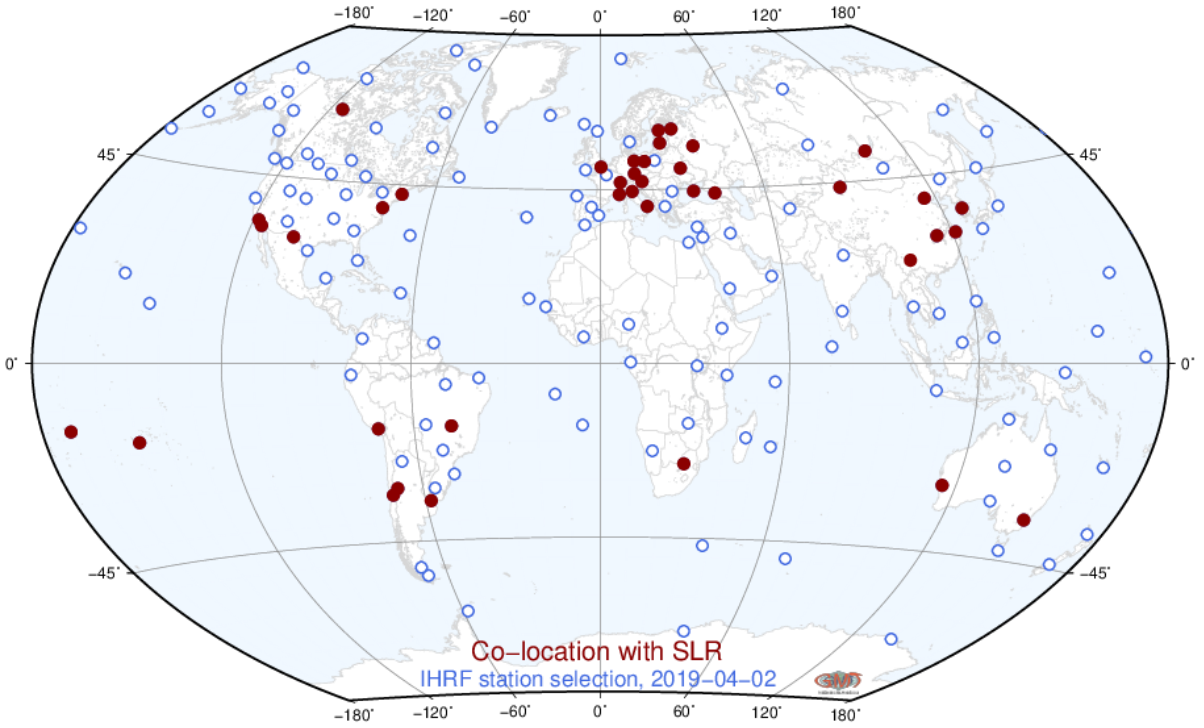
1) With the support of the GGOS Bureau for Networks and Observations, a preliminary selection based on VLBI, SLR and DORIS reference sites co-located with GNSS was prepared (Oct 2016).
2) Based on these preliminary selection, national/regional experts were asked to
   - evaluate whether these sites are suitable to be included in the IHRF: Are gravity data around these sites available? If not, is it possible to survey gravity around them?
   - propose additional geodetic sites to improve the density and distribution of the IHRF stations in their regions/countries
3) With support of the IAG JWG 2.1.1: Establishment of a global absolute gravity reference system (chair: H. Wziontek), further stations co-located with absolute gravity stations were identified.
4) A first proposal for the IHRF reference network was ready in Apr 2017.
5) Since that time some new stations have been added, others have been decommissioned.
6) It is expected that this network is extended by means of regional/national densifications.

First proposal for the IHRF reference network (~170 stations)

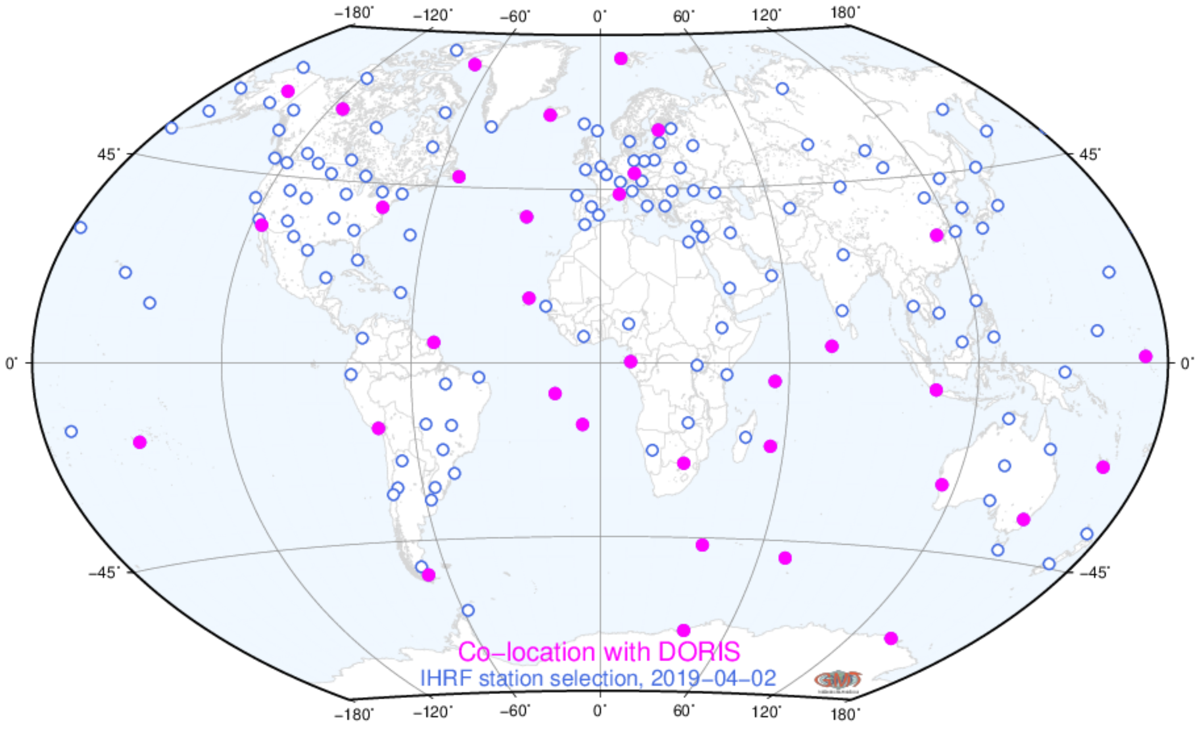




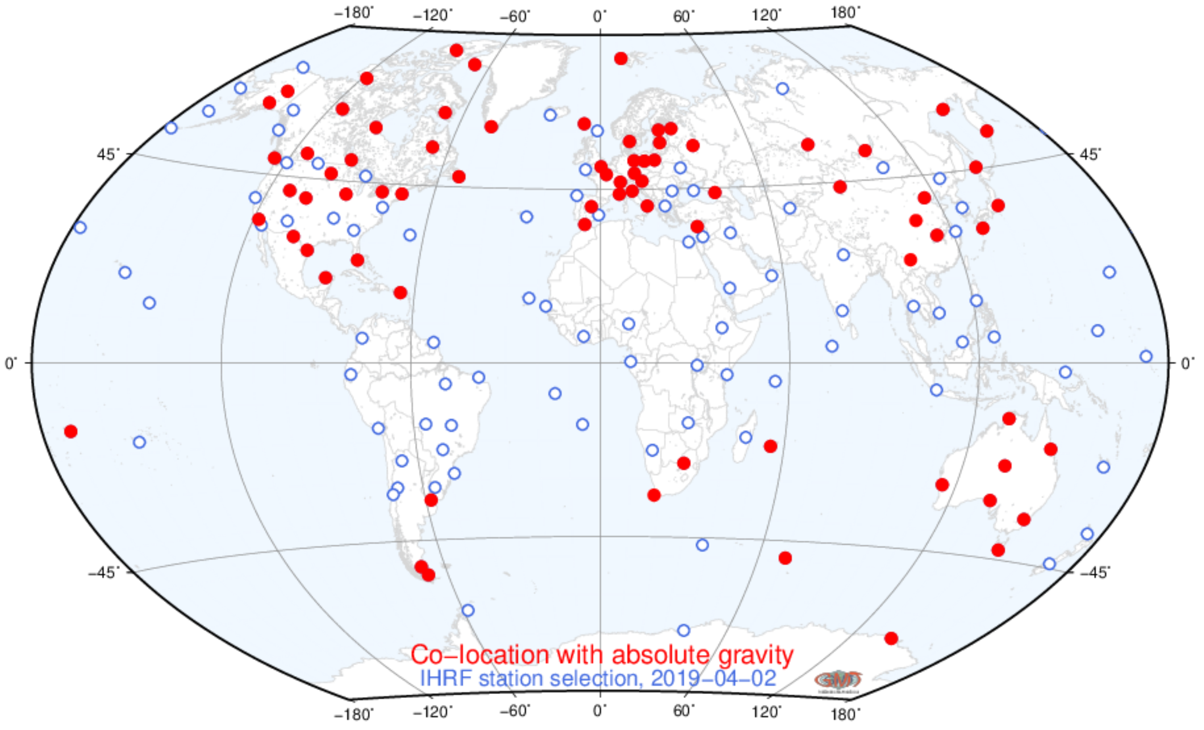
Co-location with VLBI (30 sites)



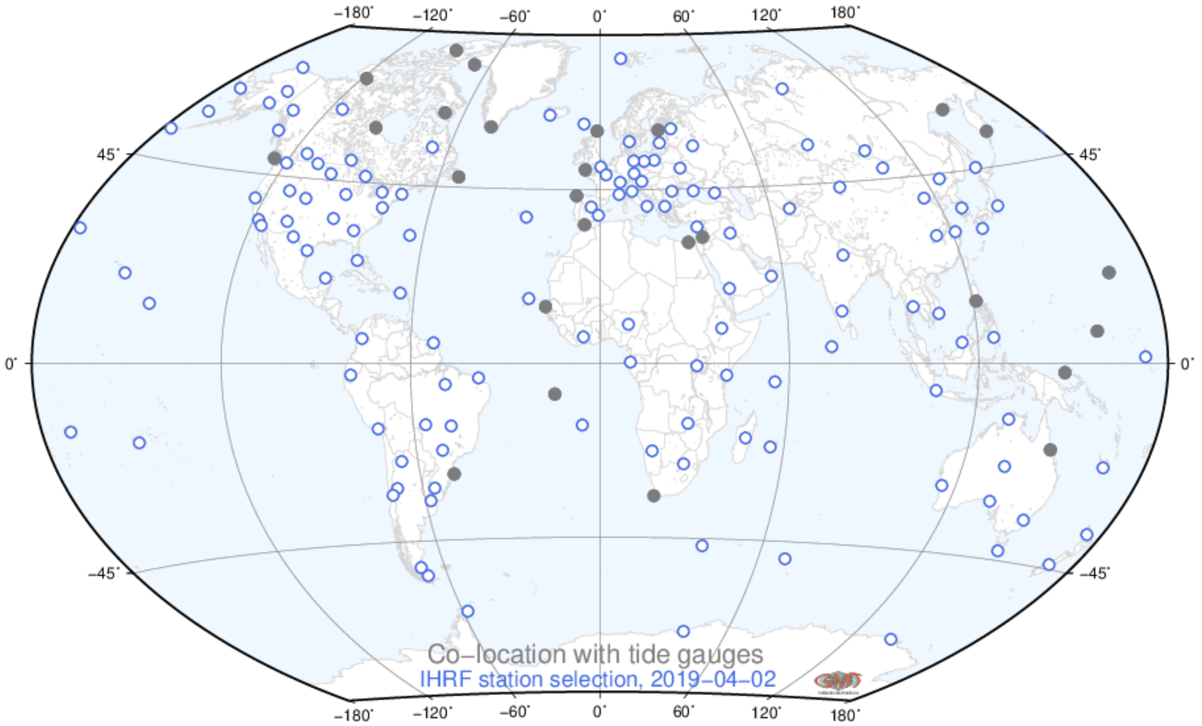
Co-location with SLR (40 sites)



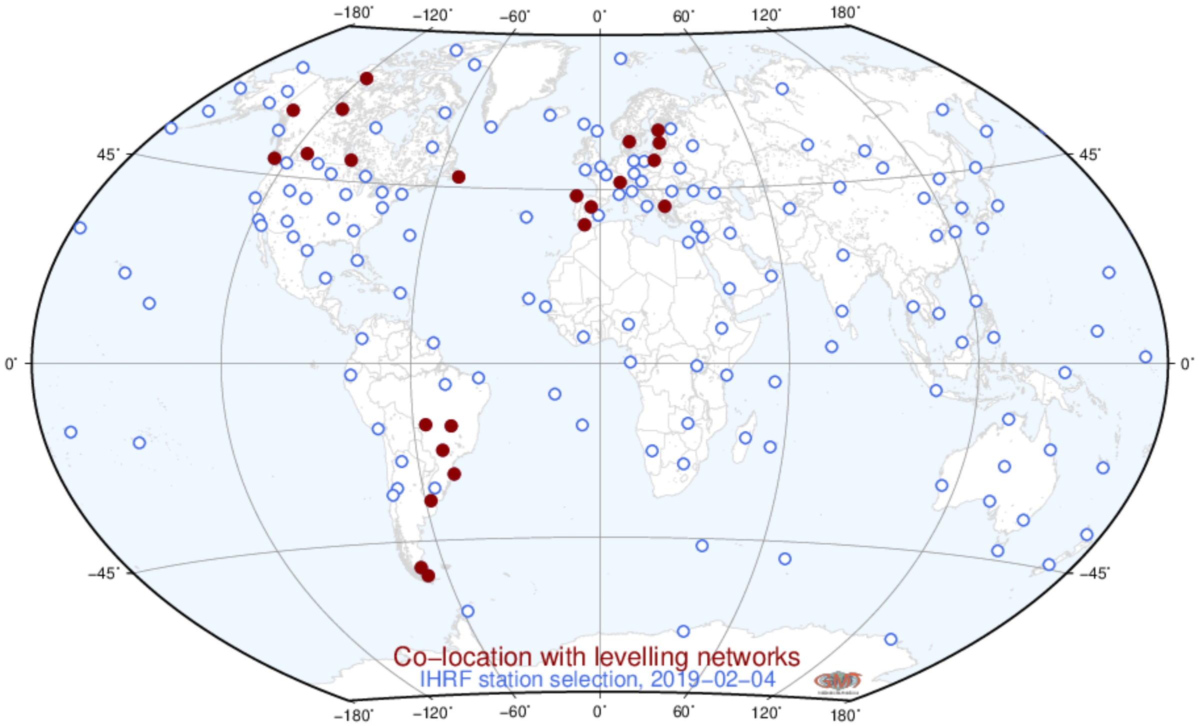
Co-location with DORIS (35 sites)



Co-location with absolute gravity (77 sites)



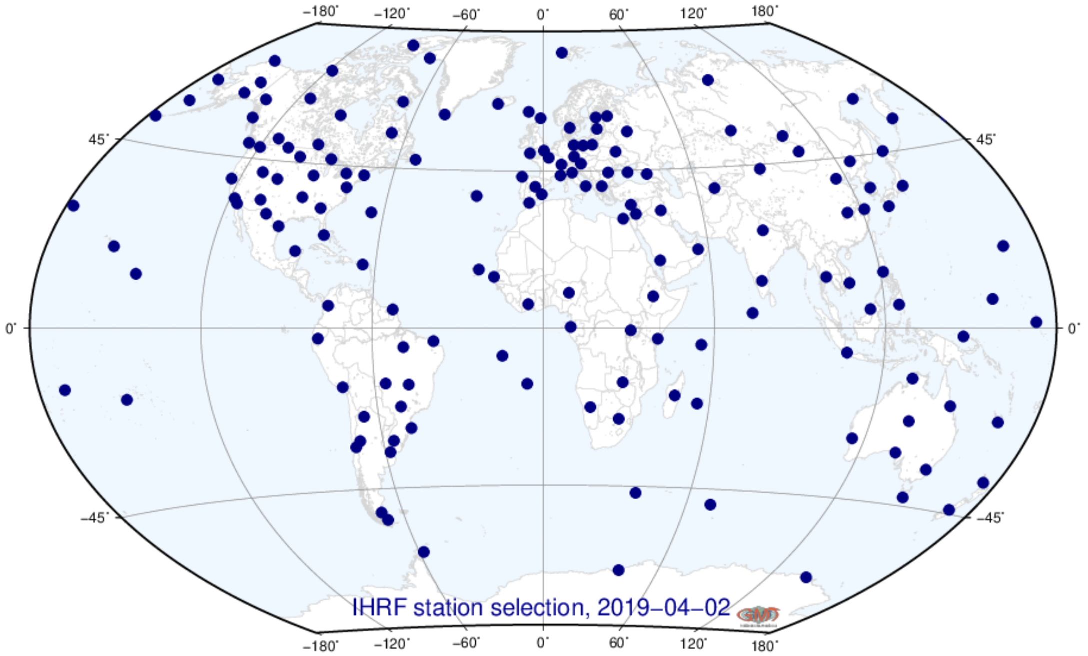
Co-location with tide gauges (26 sites)



Co-location with levelling networks (23 sites)

First attempts to determine IHRS potential values at the IHRF reference stations

1) Based on disturbing potential values and provided by colleagues involved in the (quasi-geoid) determination (Europe, Canada, Brazil, Africa)
2) Based on national (quasi-)geoid models (Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, Argentina, USA)
3) Based on the geoid model data bank of the International Service for the Geoid (ISG)
4) Based on GGM-HD + terrain gravity effects (also for comparison)



Main problems at present

1) Standards and methods used in the (quasi-)geoid determination are not (always) well-documented
2) Many (quasi-)geoid models are “fitted” to GNSS/levelling (i.e., unknown bias in recovered potential values)
3) An “accuracy assessment” is very difficult.

Outlook

1) To continue learning from the Colorado experiment
   - A special issue of the Journal of Geodesy is in preparation. All contributing solutions will be described in detail. This will allow to improve the document with the standards for the determination of potential values.
2) To compute a first static solution for the IHRF to evaluate the achievable accuracy under the present conditions (data availability, computation methods, etc.) and to identify key actions to improve the determination of the IHRS/IHRF coordinates.
3) To investigate the determination of potential changes with time $\dot{W}$.
4) To extend the realisation of the IHRS to marine areas.
5) To explore the possibilities to establish an ‘IHRS/IHRF element’ within the IGFS to ensure the maintenance and availability of the IHRF:
   - Regular updates of the IHRFyyyy to take account for:
   - new stations;
   - coordinate changes with time $\dot{\mathbf{X}}$, $\dot{W}$;
   - improvements in the estimation of $\mathbf{X}$ and W (more observations, better standards, better models, better computation algorithms, etc.).