

Proposal for a New Emoji: Iceberg

Michael Gubik
gubikmic@gmail.com

Tom Moore
tomtomtommoore@gmail.com

March 27, 2018

Abstract

The image of an iceberg represents a fascinating natural phenomenon integral to the worlds climate and serves as a popular metaphor for issues where what is visible at the surface is only a small part of the whole. Included into the Unicode Standard this emoji would enable concise expression of this powerful metaphor.

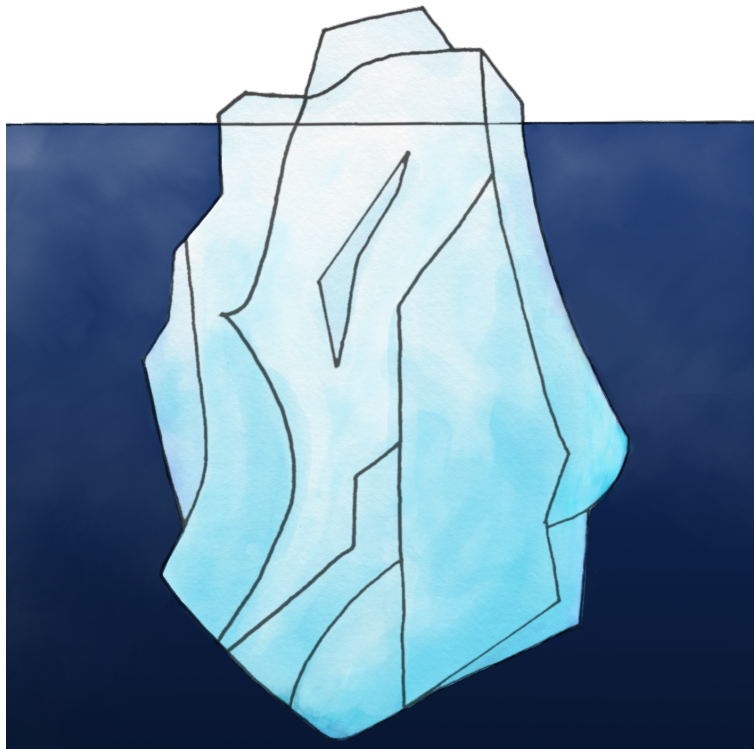


Figure 1: Image of an iceberg by Tom Moore. Released into the public domain.

1 Identification

A CLDR short name: iceberg

B CLDR keywords: ice | iceberg | ocean | water

2 Images

Color image above in Figure 1. Black & white image below in Figure 2. Both images by Tom Moore and released into the public domain.

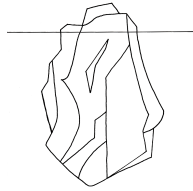


Figure 2: Black & white image of an iceberg.

3 Selection factors – Inclusion

A Compatibility

Not proposed for reasons of compatibility.

B Expected usage level

B1 Frequency

The iceberg is quite unique and thus it is more difficult to do a meaningful relative comparison. What sets it apart is its frequent figurative use. A Google News search shows 1,010,000 results for “iceberg” and the default setting is to only show recent results. The more specific “tip of the iceberg” still yields 265,000 results.

In an example comparison, a Google News search for the term “foggy”, a term that is also frequently used metaphorically, yields just 323,000 results, even though this includes weather reports as well.

We now consider the existing emoji comet, shooting star, volcano, and milky way and compare them to the proposed iceberg.

search term	Google All	Google News	Bing All	YouTube
iceberg	64,100,000	1,010,000	11,100,000	1,270,000
comet 🚀	70,600,000	473,000	15,200,000	3,030,000
shooting star 🌟	24,500,000	3,100,000	12,000,000	10,200,000
volcano 🌋	106,000,000	915,000	14,700,000	4,800,000
milky way 🌌	44,300,000	239,000	8,750,000	3,070,000

Table 1: Frequency comparison of iceberg and existing emoji

In Table 1 we want to highlight that the term “shooting star” frequently occurs in Google News - relatively much more so than other terms like “volcano” for the fact that it is a popular metaphor. The ratio of Google News to Google All indicates that the term “iceberg” is somewhat like “shooting star” and is regularly used in mass media as a metaphor.

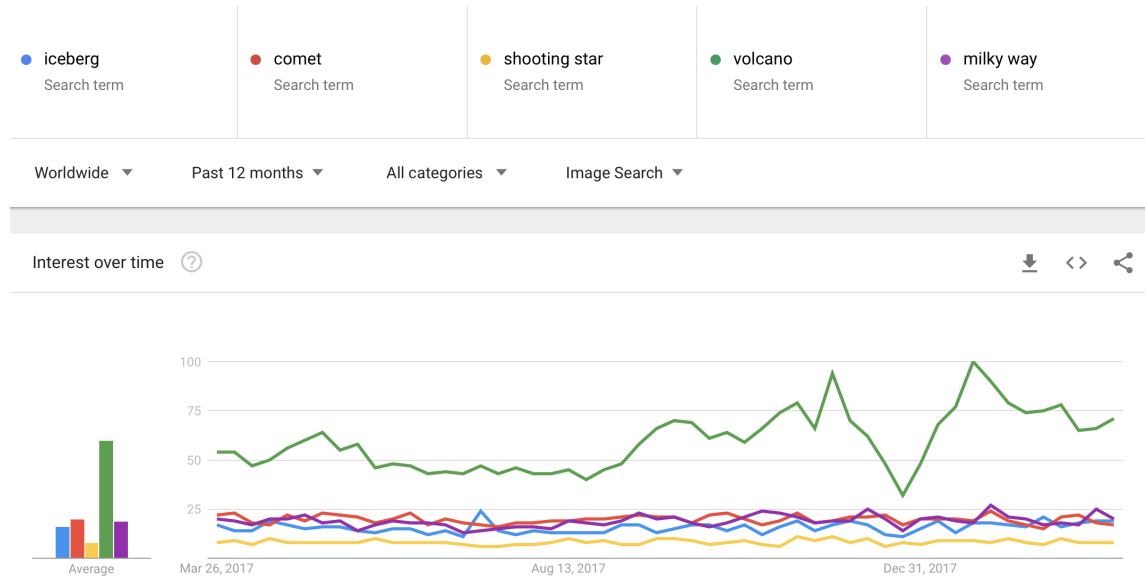


Figure 3: Google Trends comparison for image search

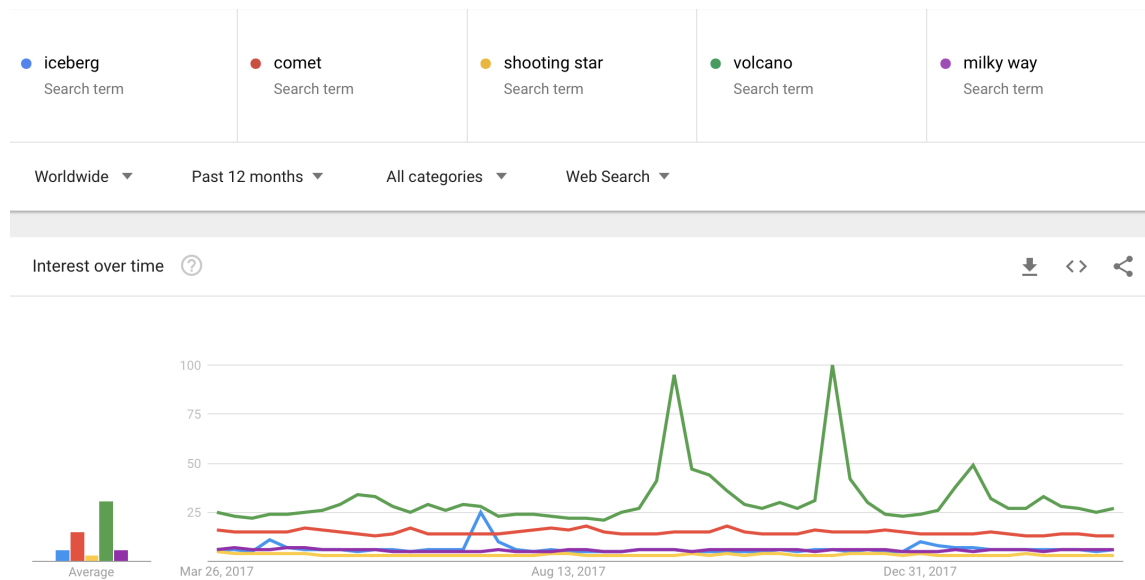


Figure 4: Google Trends comparison for web search

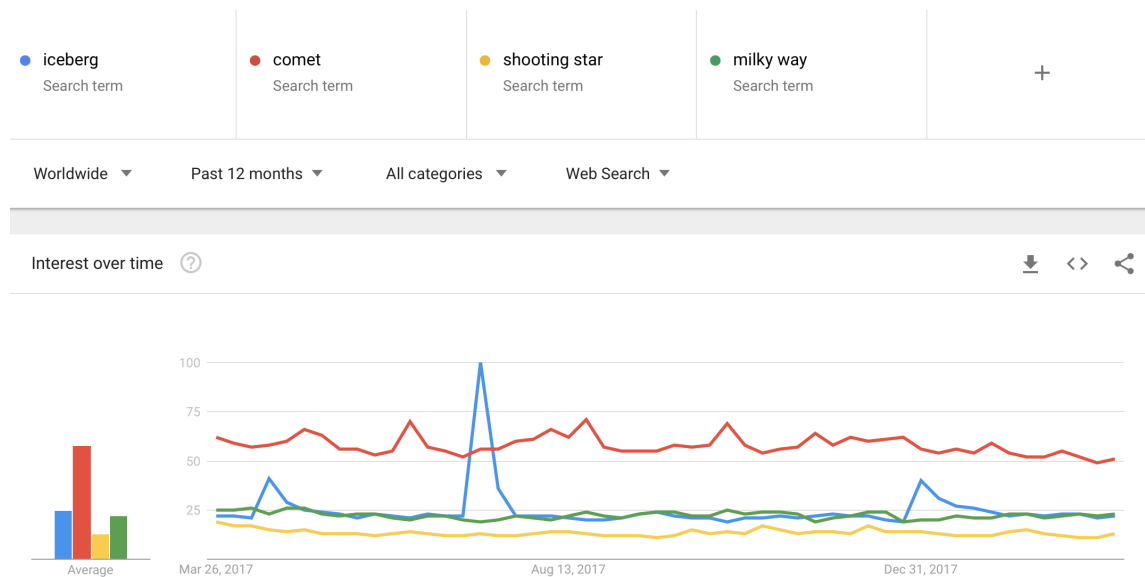


Figure 5: Google Trends comparison for web search with “volcano” excluded to get a better picture of the four terms relative to each other without the spikes from “volcano”

Figure 3, Figure 4, and Figure 5 show that “iceberg” is similarly frequent as “milky way” and “shooting star”. While “comet” is more popular, the results above in Table 1 help put things into perspective: “shooting star” is more than 6 times more popular than “comet” in Google News and yet “comet” enjoys a better ranking in Trends.

We interpret this in favor of the iceberg emoji and conclude that although it already compares well with existing emoji, its potential is probably higher than `comet` since it allows for the metaphorical use that shows in the Google News results. And while “shooting star” is a popular metaphor, it is a little bit more difficult to interpret that meaning when presented with the emoji alone. We think that the iceberg emoji would enjoy frequent use.

B2 Multiple usages

The image of an iceberg serves several usages. It can be used for the representation of an actual iceberg. It can also be used more broadly for the natural phenomenon of icebergs which has a strong association with an awareness about the global climate and changes thereof.

Icebergs became known as a great danger to ships with the sinking of the Titanic. The idea of mountains of ice reaching outward underwater much further than visible found its way into mainstream consciousness. Today, with a pictorial representation, this could be used to warn in situations with parallels to the circumstances that lead to the sinking of the Titanic.

In recent times icebergs melting at sea have also become known to represent environmental fragility. Adrift at sea the idea of an iceberg isn’t that dissimilar from an ice cube in a drink. Its life expectancy depends solely on the temperature of its environment.

And last but not least as a metaphor for situations where there is much more below the surface than visible at first. The image of an iceberg is popular for figuratively representing this. This use case would probably be the most common one.

B3 Use in sequences

No use with ZWJ suggested.

B4 Breaking new ground

The iceberg emoji breaks new ground by enabling the concise expression of at least one metaphor. But it is also broad and open to be used in a variety of ways, one of them coming from its association with the world’s climate. The image of an iceberg depicts an object that is also a phenomenon which is an integral part of the global climate. The solid that becomes the floating object has a long lifecycle, even in human terms. This image is like a snapshot in this lifecycle. But it allows to look further and see the global connectedness through the oceans and the atmosphere and relativates everyday timescales of events like a lightning strike, rain, and even the seasons.

C Image distinctiveness

The image of an iceberg is quite distinct and recognizable at small scales. Even in minimalistic representations and without the use of color, depicting the ice below the surface allows to clearly distinguish it from an island. The water surface as the division into above and below clearly sets it apart from a mountain.

D Completeness

The iceberg does not complete any obvious group, rather it would expand the **sky & weather** group with a phenomenon along a much slower timescale.

E Frequently requested

While we have not come across requests for an iceberg emoji, the typical response is something like “What, I would have assumed that already exists”.

4 Selection factors – Exclusion

F Overly specific

The iceberg emoji is not overly specific since it can be used in a variety of ways, see **B2 Multiple usages**. The image can hardly be further abstracted.

G Open-ended

There are other phenomena from nature that can be seen as one discrete object, like a lake, a river, or a waterfall. Yet, these lack the metaphorical power that the iceberg has. Moreover, it is difficult to represent these without supporting context. Adding context can lead to different interpretations and the emoji moves further away from being one character. Without context the meaning is difficult to convey, as can be the case with the fog emoji. We think the iceberg sits at a sweet spot where it is easily depictable and serves as a concise representation of a popular metaphor while being open enough to be used in other ways as well.

H Already representable

There are no emoji that currently allow the representation of an iceberg.

I Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, deities

N/A

J Transient

Not transient. Icebergs have been popularly known since at least the sinking of the Titanic in 1912. While the phrase “tip of the iceberg” might be surprisingly young (1962¹, or 1969²), it is very unlikely to disappear from language anytime soon. Ernest Hemingway conceived the Iceberg Theory, a style of writing, in 1923³.

K Faulty comparison

Not proposed because of other existing emoji.

L Exact Images

No exact image necessary. Icebergs are suitable to be represented in many different styles.

5 Sort location

A Category: **sky & weather**

B To be sorted after **water wave** 

We think that the **sky & weather** category is the best fit. The iceberg emoji could also be placed in the **place-geographic** category alongside the mountain, snow-capped mountain, and volcano, but we believe the **sky & weather** category is a better fit for the following reason. Icebergs are more a phenomenon than a place to be. A phenomenon such as snowfall, a hurricane, lightning, or ocean waves - albeit solid and existing on a much longer timescale, rather than a place to visit like a mountain. Contrary to the other weather phenomena, one iceberg can be seen as one discrete object, but grouping it with the other weather phenomena ties it into the bigger picture of weather and the climate: from being part of a large glacier to calving, to drifting, to melting into the ocean.

6 Other information

About 90% of an iceberg is below the surface⁴.

¹<https://www.etymonline.com/word/iceberg>

²<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tip%20of%20the%20iceberg>

³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iceberg_Theory

⁴<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iceberg>