



Thaw puts freeze on Svalbard

Record rainfall halts most flights during a two-week period, leaves travelers, mail, fresh food stranded

So much for warming opening up transportation in the Arctic.

Relatively high temperatures and record rainfall in January brought flights in and out of Svalbard to a halt for a sizable portion of the month. Groceries, mail, holiday plans and emergency transport were harshly impacted by what some residents called the worst series of cancellations they can recall.

Massive snowfall and knock-down winds might be the conventional image of airport-closing weather in the far north. But in this instance the culprit was water on top of ice, making many walkways and streets extremely hazardous in addition to the airport runways.

"The runway is covered in ice," wrote Svalbard Airport Manager Ole Rambech in an e-mail interview. "When it is mild and it rains, it melts the upper portion of the ice and will not keep the sand we sprinkle on it. As long as the rain and mild weather continues, we

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A shopper passes empty dairy shelves Thursday at Svalbardbutikken. Milk, eggs, vegetables and other perishables nearly ran out at the supermarket after weather prevented most planes from landing during a span of nearly two weeks. Things weren't quite as bad as the empty shelves suggest, as employees were forced to move what little remained because the refrigerator malfunctioned. Two planes with fresh supplies arrived late Thursday and weather conditions are expected to be generally favorable during the coming days.



Katzenjammer, an eclectic all-female rock/folk quartet, returns to Polarjazz for two shows on Friday after performing one of the most popular concerts during last year's festival.

Frigid festival a hot ticket

Polarjazz passes sell out in record time; a few shows still open

If you're reading this, it's probably to find out what you're already going to or what you're about to miss.

All advance tickets and passes for this year's Polarjazz festival sold out in record

time, leaving only a few performances away from the main venue open to listeners hoping to buy tickets at the door.

"We started much earlier advertising the

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Prices up, but crime way down

Criminal activity in Svalbard drops 51 percent, consumer costs rise 2.7 percent in 2009

Crime in Svalbard was "historically low" in 2009, including no reported sex, violence or drug incidents, according to the governor's office.

"We must take into account unreported incidents, but this is a small and transparent society, and we have no indications that there's an offense of significance that we would not pick up," Deputy Gov. Lars Fause told *Nordlys*.

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Corrections policy

When we screw up you'll know about it – on the front page. One of the big complaints about newspapers is they tend to bury corrections and clarifications deep inside where few people who read the original article see them. If we need to fix something, an alert box on the front page will state what story is in error and where the full correction is printed.

Submitting material

Letters, columns, photos and other material are welcome, but we can't offer pay for published items since nobody here is getting paid at the moment. Submissions in electronic form (text, Word documents, JPEGs, etc.) are highly preferred, although typing and/or scanning of items will be considered on a per-case basis. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, accuracy, libel and other reasons, but we will also make every reasonable effort to contact the author about any changes prior to publication.



This view from the bed of an air ambulance on its way from Longyearbyen to Tromsø after a four-day weather delay is not recommended for those looking to get away from it all.

We're back with a limping vengeance

As you've probably not noticed, we've been away for a month. Making the news, you might say, instead of reporting it.

In our first issue nearly a year ago I said I hoped never to write anything about me beyond that initial introduction, since I believe news is about interesting things other people are doing. But I wound up in the past two issues of the real newspaper in Longyearbyen after breaking my hip during last month's historic spell of crummy weather, so a quick explanation of *Icepeople's* absence and upcoming limitations is in order.



I'll be covering the news on crutches for the next three months, so some things will get missed (although many thanks, as always, to *Svalbardposten* for allowing me to print summaries of the many things I don't make it to). With luck, you may also see some work besides mine in here, as I hit up various people for photos and narratives of things I can't reach with my limited mobility.

But one thing is certain: I plan to continue this publication with a vengeance despite my physical and financial hardships. First, I'd

rather be a journalist here than anywhere in the world because of the people and issues involved. Second, the support I've gotten since my accident has made this place finally feel like home, not some exotic place I just happen to live. At the risk of sounding smarmy, I don't want to let down all those who've helped and offered encouragement.

So this is still about you. The unknown people who helped immediately after my fall. Whoever drove my car home rather than let it sit unlocked in the Svalbardbutikken parking lot. The medical people who looked for every way possible to keep me from having to pay the hospital bills myself (good luck with that in the U.S.). The taxi drivers who keep carrying my stuff to my third-floor flat. The Fruene gurus who keep letting me occupy a table as my de-facto office and whose cooking has added more than five kilos to my undernourished frame since I got back.

And a lot of others.

That said, I haven't gone soft and I'm sure I'll be irritating some of you in no time. As one former hometown paper put it, "If you don't want it printed, don't let it happen."

Besides, it's not like my own stupidity won't be on full display for some time to come.

- Mark Sabbatini

Local news in brief

More insecticides being found in Svalbard

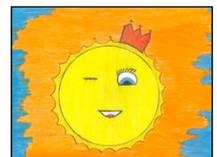
Climate might be the most effective killer of bugs in the Arctic, but researchers say up to 1,000 kilograms of some pesticide residuals may exist in Svalbard.

Environmental researchers from several entities, including The University Centre In Svalbard, have spent a decade measuring pesticide levels. They report increasing amounts are being found in ice fields and elsewhere, many of which are being carried in the atmosphere from places like Europe and Northern Asia.

A detailed summary of the researchers' work is at www.unis.no.

Solfestuka logo winner

Jairah Shane Muyano, a fifth-grade student at Longyearbyen School, is the winner from 55 entrants submitting drawings for this year's Solfestuka logo. The celebration of the return of the sun to Longyearbyen is scheduled March 7-13.





Saxophonist Kristin Sevaldsen, a performer at the 2009 Polarjazz festival, returns with a new band, Treasure, for a performance at 5 p.m. Sunday at Svalbard Church.

Getting popular performers an easy sell

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program on our Web site and updated every week," wrote Helen Flå, a member of the festival's board, in an e-mail interview. "Besides, we like to think that the festival is more and more regarded as a professional festival."

A lineup of popular musicians, some new and some returning to the 12th annual festival, certainly didn't hurt. Among the headliners is Sivert Høyem, who for years was the leader of Madrugada, promoted as "Norway's most successful rock band ever – give or take a-ha's icy pop." He released his third solo album, *Moon Landing*, last year and will play Thursday night at the Radisson Blu Polar Hotel, where all major concerts are scheduled.

Convincing Høyem to play at a Svalbard jazz festival in mid-winter proved an easy sell.

"I've been to Svalbard once before, with Madrugada back in March 2000," he wrote in an e-mail. "I loved it there, I thought it was like no other place I'd been before, so it was not hard to convince me to go again. I don't care if it's dark and cold, I'm from Northern Norway, and anyway, Oslo is way colder than Svalbard these days."

"I've played at lots of jazz festivals before, it's really not that unique to have rock acts appear at jazz festivals anymore. It's all just music anyway, and I listen to all kinds of music."

Full information about the festival is available at www.polarjazz.no.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

Polarjazz schedule

Wednesday, Feb. 3

- 9 p.m.: Vorspiel, featuring local artists. Radisson.

Thursday, Feb. 4

- 8:30 p.m.: Sivert Høyem; Farmers Market. Radisson.

Friday, Feb. 5

- Noon: Polkabjørn & Kleine Heine. Lompensenteret.
- 8 p.m.: Katzenjammer. Ungdomsklubben.
- 8:30 p.m.: Acuna/Hoff/Mathisen; Polkabjørn & Kleine Heine; Katzenjammer. Radisson. Also, Cowabunga, night jazz at Barentz Pub.

Saturday, Feb. 6

- 1 p.m.: Polkabjørn & Kleine Heine. Svalbardbutikken.
- 2 p.m.: Jazz lunch with Susanne Hansen, Treasure, Cowabunga & Marita Sørli. Barentz Pub.
- 6:30 p.m.: Creole jazz buffet with mini-concert by Anders Hunstad and Marita Sørli. Radisson. Not included in festival pass. Call 79 02 34 50 for tickets.
- 8:30 p.m.: Jan Eggum; Hekla Stålstrenga; Desafinado. Radisson.

Sunday, Feb. 7

- 5 p.m.: Treasure. Svalbard Church.

All Radisson events Feb. 4-6 sold out

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM

SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Helicopter may be best way to fix air ambulance problem

One of two government helicopters stationed in Svalbard may be the best solution for the area's lack of air ambulance services, according to a preliminary report by Helse Nord (Health North). The governor's Super Puma helicopter can fly from Longyearbyen to Hammerfest in about 5.5 hours, compared to six or seven hours for an ambulance plane to reach Tromsø. But new European Union rules have placed limits on the number of hours air ambulance crews can fly, making it impossible to transport patients from Svalbard at times. Svalbard Gov. Odd Olsen Ingerø said he is concerned using his office's helicopter will reduce readiness for rescues. "We have always been aware that it is possible to use our helicopter for such missions, but it's something we want to avoid," he said. Longyearbyen Hospital Manager Søren Nissen said helicopter transport would also require an anesthesia nurse, plus the flight crew.

Barentsburg must reduce emissions from coal plant

Emissions from the coal-fired power plant in Barentsburg must be reduced, according to Norway's climate and pollution control directorate. The agency has sent Trust Arktikugol a notice stating carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and other pollutants must be significantly reduced by Jan. 1, 2011. "What we have proposed for Barentsburg is the first step of the permit that the power plant in Longyearbyen has been given," said Harald Sørby, the agency's director. He said clearing the first 80 percent of emissions costs less, which is what Barentsburg is being asked to address. Comments on the proposed permit are being accepted until April 1.

Avalanche danger high

A warning of extreme avalanche danger was issued Jan. 28 by the Svalbard governor's office following an examination of conditions. Many large snow drifts from winter storms have disappeared, but a number remain, according to Jørgen Haagensli, leader of the Longyearbyen Red Cross.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday

Partly cloudy. ENE winds at 11 km/h. High -9C (-14C wind chill), low -10C (-16C wind chill).

Thursday

Cloudy, occasional snow. SE winds at 8 km/h. High -8C (-9C wind chill), low -9C (-10C wind chill).

Friday

Some snow, then clouds. ESE winds at 8 km/h. High -6C (-7C wind chill), low -10C (-11C wind chill).

Saturday

Snow. ENE winds at 8 km/h. High -7C (-9C wind chill), low -12C (-13C wind chill).

Extended forecast: Sunday, mostly cloudy, -8C (-12C), -11C (-16C); Monday, snow, then flurries, -7C (-14C), -12C (-21C); Tuesday, cloudy, then flurries -8C (-17C), -12C (-20C); Wednesday, periods of snow, -8C (-11C), -12C (-13C).

Data provided by AccuWeather.com



A mail flight from Tromsø veered off the runway at Svalbard Airport at midday Jan. 25 due to slippery conditions caused by poor weather, coming to a stop off the paved surface at a 90-degree angle to the runway about 300 meters short of its end. No injuries were reported, but the airplane sustained some damage to a wing. Photo generated by Google Earth.

Flight cancellations called unprecedented

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have the problem."

Eight Scandinavian Airlines flights to and from Longyearbyen were canceled due to weather and slippery runways between Jan. 15 and 27, not including another flight cancelled due to heavy fog in Tromsø, according to *Svalbardposten*. Hundreds of passengers were stranded at length in both cities, filling hotels and forcing some travelers at one point to stay in Oslo because Tromsø had no more accommodations.

"We have not had similar (problems) during my years in Svalbard," wrote Rambech, a resident since 2001.

Morten Helliksen, administrative director of Svalbardbutikken, also called the cancelled flights "a unique and special situation that we have not encountered before." He said the store ended up without milk, fruit and vegetables for two days after a mail plane which brings such items skidded off a Svalbard Airport runway Jan. 25.

"It was standing for four days at Svalbard Airport because technicians had to come from Tromsø and inspect the mail plane before it

could return to Tromsø," he wrote in an e-mail, adding "it took two days before we could get milk, fruit and vegetables with a different mail plane."

Longyearbyen residents were in no danger of starving, since the store and its warehouse contain enough food for three to four months even if no deliveries by ship or plane were possible, Helliksen noted.

Longyearbyen's average January temperature of minus 7.2 degrees Celsius was warmer than Oslo's average of minus 8.1 degrees, an occurrence Norwegian Meteorological Institute officials said they have not seen before.

Total precipitation in Longyearbyen was 68.7 mm, far above the January average of 15 mm. A monthly record for rainfall was set by Jan. 18 with 39.8 mm, including a record 16.9 mm during a 24-hour period ending that day.

About 15 mm more precipitation was recorded during above-freezing temperatures before the end of the month, although an exact rainfall total for January was not available at press time.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

More cases get solved faster in Svalbard

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The governor's office investigated 39 crimes, a 51 percent drop from 80 in 2008.

"The decrease is due primarily to the number of acquisitive crime being more than halved since 2008," a report by the governor's office states.

They also cleared more incidents and in a shorter period of time than the national average, according to the report. It states 57 percent of crimes and 93 percent of minor offenses were solved, compared to the national averages of 34 percent and 80 percent, respectively. Case processing took 32 days for crimes and 46 days for lesser offenses in Svalbard, compared to 123 days and 79 days nationally.

Major cases in 2009 included a 500,000

kroner fine against the Russian firm Trust Artikugol for a mine fire, two officers fined and imprisoned for causing a shipwreck off Bjørnøya, and the theft of several hundred thousand kroner from a safe in Ny-Ålesund.

Svalbard also differed statistically from the mainland when it came to consumer prices in 2009, but in this instance totals were higher.

The consumer price index for Svalbard rose 2.7 percent from October 2008 to October 2009, compared to 2.1 percent on the mainland, according to a report by Longyearbyen officials. Electricity and district heating were the largest factors, increasing 18.5 percent and 4.2 percent. Rent and food prices in Svalbard rose 3.3 percent and 3.9 percent, respectively.

What's up

Feb. 3-7

Polarjazz 2010 festival. See complete schedule on page 3.

Feb. 7

11 a.m.: Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Couples Retreat," U.S. comedy/romance, ages 7 and up. Huset.

Feb. 9

7 p.m.: Meeting of the local board. Mediateket at Lompensenteret.

Feb. 11

7:30 p.m.: Undercover police agent Johnny Brenna discusses the award-winning book "Politi & Røver," he co-authored about a Munch robbery, and the history of Norway's crime and police work during the past 20 years. Longyearbyen Library.

Feb. 14

11 a.m.: Youth baptism. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Arthur og Maltazards Hevn," French animated family film with Norwegian speech, ages 7 and up. Huset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "It's Complicated," U.S. romance, all ages. Huset.

Feb. 16

7 p.m.: Presentation "Images from the '50s" by Tone Nødtvedt. Svalbard Church.

Feb 18

2 p.m.: Meeting of the board of culture and leisure. Næringsbygget, "Tundra" room.

6 p.m.: Bydrift board meeting. Smutthullet meeting room.

Feb. 19

9 a.m.: Board for early enterprise meeting. Næringsbygget, "Tundra" room.

Feb. 21

11 a.m.: Baptism liturgy. Svalbard Church.

What's online

Icepeople.net provides daily updates of news about Svalbard and the world's polar regions, plus extras for articles from the print edition. Among the latest news:

- *Diving in Svalbard's winter waters*
- *Svalbard named world's coolest lab*
- *1 in 8 depressed during dark season*
- *Bin Laden: U.S. causing global warming*