



SVALBARD GLOBAL SEED VAULT TURNS FOUR

A show of life from Syria

Seed deposit from war-torn area into Svalbard vault gets lots of media attention – and control

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Cary Fowler made the precarious walk down the sloping underground tunnel to the vault, which for the past year has been coated with ice. At the bottom he was asked to do it again – this time for the cameras.

He did so willingly – as did a second official to appease another film crew – which is now all in the line of duty as the Svalbard Global Seed Vault reaches its fourth birthday.

For this year's celebration the vault's guides and workers spent three days performing the seemingly simple task of getting some boxes of seeds from the airport into the main storage vault close by. But those actions were observed by camera crews from Norway to New Zealand and these weren't just any seeds as some came from Syria, where the huge

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Workers at the Svalbard Global Seed Vault unload boxes in front of the main storage vault this week for film crews from Brazil and New Zealand. Others participating in the visit were asked to keep their distance and silence during what was essentially a makework task done at the request of the crews.

Sun may keep our buying habits in the dark

Government tries tracking local spending with 300-household survey – will we mislead them?

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

People generally don't think about asking for a receipt when they buy a hot dog, but for the next couple of weeks a lot of locals are go-

ing to be letting those little slips of paper pile up for even the most trivial purchases.

A survey of 300 Longyearbyen households began Monday as Statistics Norway complies a study of the city's spending habits – or so they think. Since the study is occurring during Solfestuka with its week of jam-packed events, the number crunchers might conclude locals spend a rather hefty amount on rock concerts and other entertainment.

While keeping all those receipts and filling out some paperwork might be a bother, the randomly selected households do have incentive as Statistics Norway will raffle off one 10,000-kroner and ten 1,000-kroner gift certificates for Svalbardbutikken at the conclusion. (Disclosure: The writer of this article is among those selected for the survey, although acceptance of any such payment is pending the opinion of a

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We love you sun – now stay away

Solfestuka worships light's return, but guest of honor asked to chill



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

A lack of snow may put the chill on the sledding contest that is Solfestuka's most popular event.

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

It's not that your light isn't appreciated. It's just that, well, you've kinda saturated us with your presence already this year.

A sledding contest that is the most popular event at Longyearbyen's most popular festival is facing a meltdown due to a month of freakish heat in January and early February. So while there will be a week packed with events ranging from art galas to rock concerts

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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.

Now you see it...



ARILD LYSSAND / SYSSELMANNEN

This infrastructure for a satellite station in Barentsburg was built illegally by the Russians and must be removed by May 15, according to the Svalbard governor's office. The facility, consisting of two container cabins and three concrete foundations for the satellite antennas, was built in the Russian settlement last summer and spotted by governor's officials last September, who had stated necessary permits needed to be obtained first.

Survey aims to track buying – maybe

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U.S. professional journalism organization.)

Results will be used to compile reports similar to those from 1990, 2001 and 2007.

Cashiers at stores large and small mostly said they didn't see a difference in the number of customers keeping receipts during the first two days of the survey. Indeed, many didn't even know the survey is taking place.

"I always ask them if they need a receipt," said Novelyn Martinez, a cashier at Mix butikken, where people are buying those hot

dogs. "It's so rare they ask."

Similarly, Sunniva Helsingreen, manager Karls-Berger Pub, said most people asking for receipts tend to be business travelers and she hasn't seen much change from locals.

But a few are noticing a difference.

"Normally they just say 'Never mind, throw it away,' but now they're saying 'wait, I need to keep the receipt,'" said Borghild Ytredal, a pharmacist at Apotek Spitsbergen.

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

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

For everyone wondering why we frequently ponder the adventures of the zombies patrolling the local seed vault, despite knowing the people involved with it hate the "doomsday" nickname it's stuck with, here's just a few of this week's many examples showing why we're just channeling the brain-dead. The combination of Syrian seeds and the birthday of a vault for the end of the world is irresistible for snark scribes, with headlines lines like "Artifacts of the Apocalypse" and "New World Order Preparations" topping articles of equally, ahem, intriguing content. One writer argues the vault is in the wrong place because, like Leningrad during WWII, it's vulnerable to looting because it's near a city (yeah, we'll be eager to raid those seeds to take advantage of our thriving agriculture potential). Even *The Atlantic*, which has an article by Ross Andersen that's among the best we've ever seen (Google it), also has a companion piece headlined "A Special Kind of Syrian Doomsaying" where the writer says the deposit "carries a special kind of apocalyptic prediction" for that country's fate. The science/technology blog io9

uses the occasion to put us among "10 Places to Ride Out the Apocalypse," along with spots like the NORAD defense facility deep inside a Colorado mountain and Pyongyang North Korea (huh?). In the U.S. state of Wyoming a "doomsday bill" seeks to develop a plan for a catastrophic scenario, a seemingly serious and positive thing, except provisions like minting their own currency are resulting in guffaws and accompanying pictures from things such as the asteroid-hits-Earth movie "Deep Impact" ... Moving on to a local celebration mostly free of lunacy, the Canadian newspaper *Métro Montréal* has declared Kjell Mork the world's northernmost citizen. The newspaper's judgement was based on "normal" settlements, thus excluding research stations like Ny-Ålesund, and Mork's home of 33 years at Sjømrådet met the standard of whatever measurements they were using. Just a couple of things: Mork is leaving Longyearbyen, if he hasn't already, and a number of *Svalbardposten* readers thought the honor should go to Silje Våtvik at her Vestpynten home. We'll keep an eye on the Canadian newspaper to see if they do any updates reflecting the new imminent reality.



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Cary Fowler, executive director of the Global Crop Diversity Trust, top, shows seeds from Syria and other countries in the main storage area of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault this week. At bottom left, Fowler escorts guests down the main tunnel to the vault – for a second time after a film crew asked him to repeat the walk for cameras. At bottom right, Fowler shows boxes of seeds from Syria about to be deposited that will complete the war-torn country's collection.

Seeds from Syria give vault life

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death toll from an escalating war is galvanizing the world's attention.

"What's happening in Syria right now shows why the seed vault is important," said Fowler, noting wars destroyed seed banks in Iraq and Afghanistan, and another in Egypt was looted during last year's uprising. "This is one of the most important collections in the world and it's the last of their collection that has not been duplicated."

"I think they had to work very hard and fast to get these here," he said.

That gives media organizations worldwide an irresistible hook, as those not observing this

week's deposit are using footage from those who are. While much of that footage is stage-managed, with camera crews often giving the orders instead of vault officials who once kept things under tight control, Fowler said the resulting increased coverage is making a real-world difference with policymakers and other organizations devoted to seed preservation.

"A lot of folks say they're getting their funding because of us," he said.

The latest deposit of 25,000 samples means more than 740,000 samples are now in the vault that opened in February of 2008.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Longyearbyen's per-capita waste lowest in many years

Longyearbyen residents produced an average of 906 kilograms of waste in 2011, the lowest figure in many years, according to Bydrift, the city's municipal waste agency. Total waste generated was 1.86 million kilograms, a 1.3 percent increase compared to 2010, due to a larger number of residents. Most of the waste was recycled, with 14 percent dumped into the landfill at Adventdalen. "It is very encouraging that more waste is being recycled," said Marianne Aasen, Bydrift's general manager. "That means our landfill will last much longer." The city sent 1,600 tons of garbage to the mainland, with 1,138 tons incinerated and the rest recycled. Previous per-capita waste averages were 915 kilograms in 2010, 1,334 in 2009, 1,066 in 2008 and 1,192 in 2007.

Skimarathon again accepting racers as more offer to help

Registration is again open for the 20th Svalbard Skimarathon after being halted in December when organizers said the maximum capacity of 500 was reached. The limit was due to logistics and security, but additional volunteers have since signed up for trail maintenance and other race duties. Last year's record of 520 racers is expected to be topped since 50 to 60 people already on a waiting list, with officials expecting as many as 650 racers for the April 28 event. Race information is available at www.svalbardturn.no.

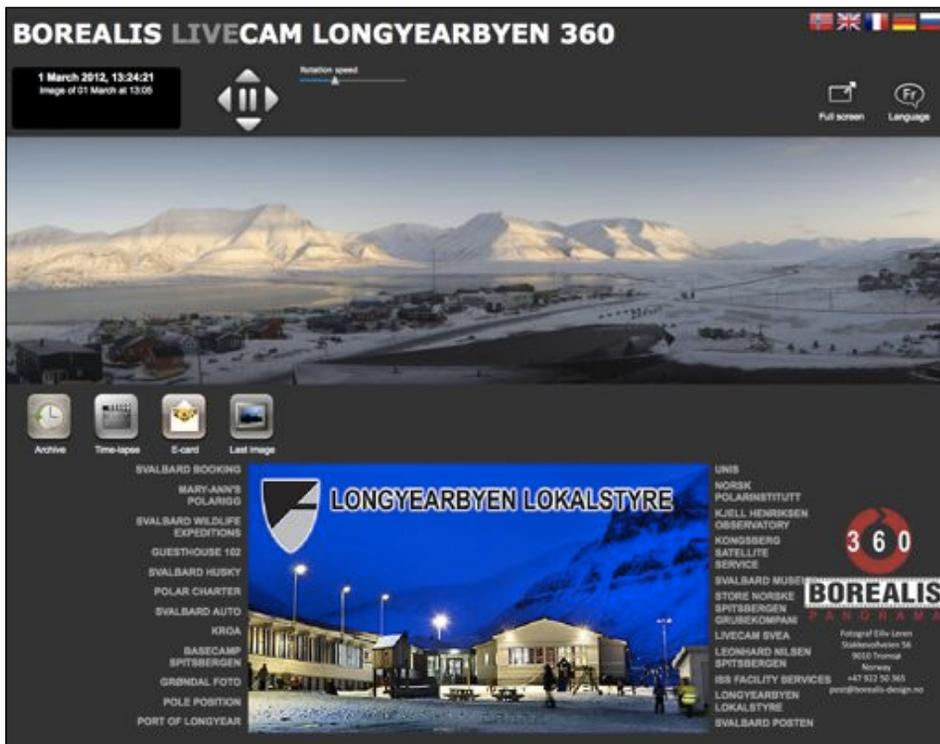
Local youth group at Utøya grows from 10 to 22 in a year

Membership in Svalbard AUF, the local chapter of the national youth political group that hosts camps at Utøya annually, has increased to 22 members compared to 10 a year ago. "We have not undertaken any major promotional campaigns," said Inger-Johanne Mørk, the group's leader, adding she does not believe last year's July 22 shooting is the only reason for the growth. "I think most of our new members have seen how we work locally and how we have been committed to cases in the past." Five members of the group attended the annual meeting between the Svalbard and Troms chapters two weekends ago.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly cloudy. NE winds to 53 km/h. High -6C (-16C wind chill), low -8C (-18C wind chill).	Snow. NE winds to 18 km/h. High -8C (-11C wind chill), low -8C (-15C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. N winds to 18 km/h. High -14C (-21C wind chill), low -16C (-25C wind chill).	Snow late. Variable winds to 15 km/h. High -9C (-15C wind chill), low -16C (-25C wind chill).
Sunrise 8:32a; sunset 3:50p	Sunrise 8:23a; sunset 3:59p	Sunrise 8:14a; sunset 4:07p	Sunrise 8:05a; sunset 4:16p
Extended forecast: Sunday, snow, -5C (-10C), -7C (-13C), light 8:27h; Monday, snow, -4C (-9C), -4C (-10C), light 8:44h; Tuesday, snow, -3C (-9C), -4C (-10C), light 9:00h; Wednesday, snow, -4C (-9C), -6C (-11C), light 9:16h			

Data provided by yr.no



UNIS

A live 360-degree webcam shows the progress of sunlight toward Longyearbyen. The camera, mounted on the roof at The University Centre in Svalbard, is at <http://longyearbyen.livecam360.com>.

Honoring the sun, hoping for snow

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beginning Saturday, organizers are concerned first about whether the sun decides to show up.

"We are hoping there will be lots of snow next week," said Roger Ødegård, the city's cultural advisor.

The sun officially rose Feb. 16, but the surrounding mountains means most of the settled area won't have a chance to get a glimpse of sunlight until March 8. An outdoor annual ceremony midday near Svalbard Church is where that glimpse occurs, but would Ødegård prefer sun or the all-important snow for that March 10 sledding race?

"I think it's most important to have more snow, because the sun will always return," he said. "It will return sooner or later, at least."

A bright spot at the event, sun or not, is the hosting of it by Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, who will be accompanied by European Union Foreign Minister Lady Ashton. There will also be the traditional singing by a children's choir, followed by what's often a quick dash out of the cold into the church for food and warm drinks.

If the weather is foul – and the forecast is for several days of snow starting Saturday – most of the week's events are indoors.

They begin with a flurry of activities packed into Sunday evening, including art exhibits and a saxophone/piano concert at Galleri Svalbard, with an exhibit by local photographers at the Arts and Crafts Center. That will be followed by what Ødegård expects to be the most popular concert event as Jonas Alaska, a pop singer/songwriter nominated for three Norwegian Grammys in 2011 for his self-titled debut album, performs at 8 p.m. at Kulturhuset.

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

Solfestuka schedule

Sunday

- 11 a.m.: Mass: "The Light is Back." Svalbard Church.
- 6 p.m.: Official opening, featuring art by Janne Talstad and Magnhild Øen Nordahl at Galleri Svalbard, and the exhibit "Arctic Wildlife" by the Longyearbyen Fotoklubb at the Arts and Crafts Center. Also, saxophonist Håvard Salvesen Njølstad, winner of the 2011 Youth Music Championship, will perform with pianist Espen Rotevatn at Galleri Svalbard.
- 8 p.m.: Concert by Jonas Alaska, Grammy winner for best new artist. Kulturhuset.

Monday

- 11:30 a.m.: Concert by Håvard Salvesen Njølstad and Espen Rotevatn. UNIS.
- 6 p.m.: "Frozen Planet, part one," BBC series featuring Svalbard. Kulturhuset. Also 6 p.m. Tues.
- 8 p.m.: Solquiz. Kulturhuset cafe.

Tuesday

- 10 p.m.: Solar activities for children ages 1 to 3. LongyearbyenKindergarten.
- 7 p.m.: Mass /Father Mirek. Svalbard Church.
- 7:30 p.m.: Solkafe, with traditional singing and choirs. Huset cafe.
- 8 p.m.: Double concert by rock bands Violent Blonde, Disko Slam. Longyearbyen Youth Club.

Wednesday

- 10 a.m.: Sledding for youths ages 3 to 6. Behind Radisson hotel.
- 6 and 9 p.m.: "Frozen Planet," parts two and three. Kulturhuset.

Thursday

- Noon: Celebration of sun's return. Old hospital stairs at Skjæringa. Followed by food and drinks at Svalbard Church.
 - 5 p.m.: Youth talent competition. Kulturhuset.
 - 5-11 p.m.: Solfest BBQ. Svalbard.
 - 10 p.m.: Concert by rock band Oslo Ess. Kroa.
- Remaining schedule available at solfest.no.**

What's up

Feb. 29

6 p.m.: Movie: "This Means War," U.S. action/comedy, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Varg Veum - De Døde Har Det Godt," Norwegian/Danish crime/thriller, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

March 4-10

Solfestuka, celebrating the return of the sun's presence to Longyearbyen. See scheduled at left and at www.solfest.no.

March 11

11 a.m.: Hillmar Nøis dogsled race to determine starting positions for Trappers' Trail. Starts at Nordlysstasjonen. More information at www.longyearbyenhundeklubb.no.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Man on a Ledge," U.S. thriller, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Into the White," Norwegian drama/war, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

March 19

6 p.m.: Presentation: Transit of Venus, which will occur June 5-6 with Svalbard among Earth's best observation points. The next transit will be in 2117. Hosted by Knut Jørgen Røed Ødegård. Svalbard Museum.

March 20

Noon: Presentation: Children and nutrition, by nurse Reidun Holte. Longyearbyen Library.

March 31

Meter reading Q1 due.

April 10

7 p.m.: Concert: Neva-Volga, a capella ensemble from St. Petersburg, featuring works from Russian monastic tradition and Russian classical composers. Svalbard Church.

April 14-15

Trappers' Trail dogsled race. Details at www.longyearbyenhundeklubb.no.

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:

- *How Norway sees Arctic vs. China*
- *Shell starts huge legal Arctic drilling war*
- *Two killed as fire destroys Antarctic base*
- *Bone boffins built big penguin w/ fossils*