



Savoring some serious sun



Sunlight hits the mountains at midday Tuesday on Adventfjord across from the center of Longyearbyen. The town will celebrate the symbolic, if not official, return of the sun at noon March 8 outside Svalbard Church as part of the weeklong Solfestuka festival.

Annual Solfestuka celebrates light's return with crazy sleds, skits, songs – and lots of cold

Who could possibly be unhappy to see the sun return after months of darkness?

A lot of people living in Arctic villages it turns out, as recent studies show depression peaks during the months of continuous summer light. But it seems people in Svalbard – here by choice and more active than their northern peers – don't share that view.

Solfestuka, a weeklong celebration of the sun's return that begins Sunday, seems by far the most popular event of the year among Longyearbyen residents. Sure, some find sleeping harder and the swarms of tourists an occasional nuisance, but not many go through the serious and often abusive downers all that sun causes elsewhere.

"I believe that the level of activity and all the offerings we have throughout the year helps to reduce the problem," wrote Roger Ødegård, Longyearbyen's cultural advisor, in an e-mail interview.

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Jawbone reveals evolution of polar bears

Specimen found in Svalbard shows animals descended from brown bears 150,000 years ago

Polar bears came into existence by evolving during a period of climate change, but might not be so adaptable to modern global warming, according to scientists studying a jawbone fossil discovered in Svalbard.

The jawbone from a bear that died 110,000 to 130,000 years ago was found in 2004 during a geology excursion to Poolepynten by The

University Centre In Svalbard. Researchers said in January it is the oldest polar bear fossil ever found and indicated it could provide critical data about the species' evolutionary history.

A paper co-authored by 14 researchers states the find suggests polar bears originated by evolving from brown bears during an ice age 150,000 years ago. That makes the polar bear a young species in the evolutionary cycle and one that adapted quickly to changing conditions.

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This polar bear jawbone from Svalbard is the oldest known specimen. Photo provided by UNIS.

New Svalbard topo maps go online

Walrus, oil exploration, hunting areas, ice cover, other updated data viewable from near and far

It's now easier than ever to get lost using a map.

A new online interactive map of Svalbard offering views of more than 30 kinds of data – all at once, if so desired – is being offered by the Norwegian Polar Institute. Users can view the entire archipelago or specific areas in precise topographical detail, along with information such as where walrus rest and oil exploration is occurring.

"In addition to the usual ability to zoom and move around the map, it is also possible to draw and place text, make prints and scan," the institute notes in a statement. "For all data sets, the user can also retrieve...the actual metadata."

Among the categories are protected areas, hunting areas, traffic regulations, sea ice history, vegetation (10 or 37 classifications) and administrative divisions. The data is updated continuously by the institute and Svalbard governor's office, which is collaborating on the project.

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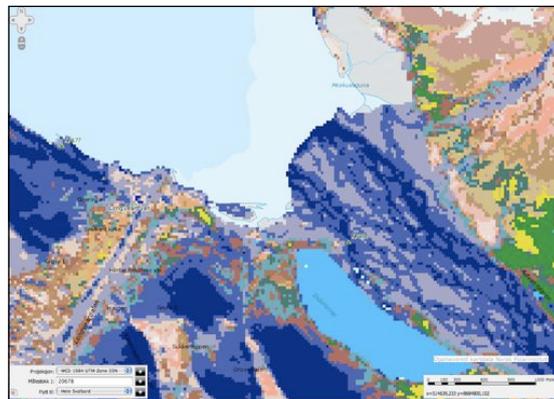
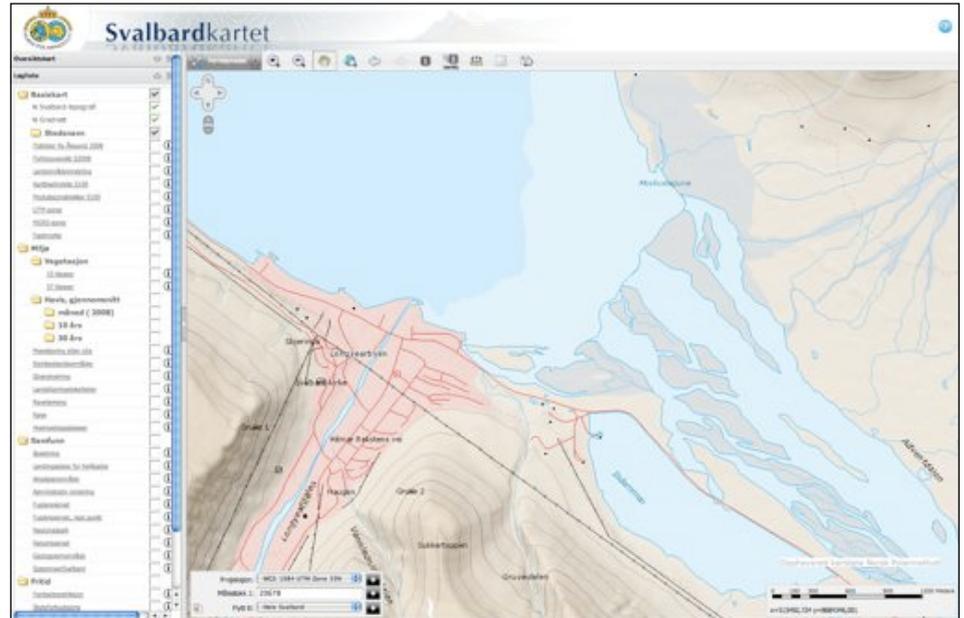
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When we screw up you'll know about it – on the front page. One of the big complaints about newspapers is they tend to bury corrections and clarifications deep inside where few people who read the original article see them. If we need to fix something, 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.



Longyearbyen and the surrounding area are shown in topographic detail, above, as part of a new collection of online maps of Svalbard prepared by the Norwegian Polar Institute and Svalbard governor's office. At left, a map of the same area is color-coded to show 37 types of vegetation. The continuously updated maps can show – separately or at the same time – other details such as sea ice history, exploratory oil activity, walrus resting areas and hunting zones. The maps are at www.npolar.no/svalbardkartet.

New Web site offers many views of Svalbard

MAPS, from page 1

All information at the map's Web site (www.npolar.no/svalbardkartet) is in Norwegian, but the site works on a limited basis using Google Translate.

"Currently the service is built for up to 50 simultaneous users," the institute notes. "This will be increased if necessary."

The map can also be used directly in other map services such as Google Earth.

There was no trouble accessing the site at several different times on different days, but some overlays and data can be slow to load even with a high-speed connection. Also the user is automatically logged off after a period of inactivity.

Briefly

Hundreds of homes to get food grinders in May

Food waste disposals will be installed in the kitchen sinks of residences throughout Longyearbyen in May, following the Svalbard governor's adoption of a requirement the grinders be in all of the city's homes.

The installations by a company working with the city will take about four weeks. The town's six largest building owners have already arranged for the disposals to be placed in 950 residences.

Other home owners can participate in the joint project by contacting 79 02 23 76 by May 1. Information about obtaining disposals independently will be at www.lokalstyre.no beginning in May.

The governor's requirement states all residences must install, operate and maintain food

disposals by July 1.

Applications for IPY field course being accepted

Applications for the second IPY Field School this summer at The University Centre In Svalbard are being accepted through April 8.

The course, from June 21 to July 9, focuses on past, present and future environmental changes in polar areas. Up to 26 undergraduate and early graduate students will be accepted.

Classroom and field projects covering Arctic and Antarctic areas will be covered, as well as career development opportunities. Last year 24 students from 11 countries participated, with its success resulting in funding for the course through 2011.

More information and applications are available at www.unis.no.

A polar bear cub and its mother drift on a rapidly shrinking iceberg about 12 miles offshore in Olga Strait. Eric Lefranc, who took this photo during a Svalbard cruise, told news organizations this week the mother could likely swim to shore, but "our guide was quite pessimistic about the survival of the cub."



Fossil shows polar bears adapted to climate

BEARS, from page 1

Past opinions about the origin of the polar bear have ranged from 50,000 to more than 1 million years ago. The DNA of the jawbone discovered in Svalbard was compared to polar and brown bears in Alaska, with evidence suggesting brown bears evolved to cope with the ice age's cold.

"By very early in their evolutionary history, polar bears were already inhabitants of the Arctic sea ice and had adapted very rapidly to their current and unique ecology at the top of the Arctic marine food chain," the study notes.

That means polar bears also survived a period of global warming 130,000 to 115,000 years ago. But just because they adapted then doesn't mean they can do the same during the drastic transformation scientists say the Arctic is now experiencing.

"Early polar bears would not have had all the specializations of modern animals and we know nothing about their behavior," said Chris Stringer, a professor at the Natural History Museum in London, in an interview with *The Sunday Times*. "Living through a warm period back then does not mean they are resilient to climate change now."

The next step for researchers will be studying the fossil's genom in an attempt to reconstruct the polar bear's entire evolutionary history.

UNIS students "stumbled" across the 23-cm fossil during their 2004 summer excursion, according to the university. The specimen was originally thought to be a female, but further study indicates it is a fully grown male similar in size to today's creatures.

The sediment in which the jawbone was found was deposited during a period of high relative sea levels, subsequent to a regional deglaciation, suggesting advection of relatively

warm North Atlantic water to the site at the time, the UNIS report adds. The fossil is also exceptionally well preserved, likely due to a combination of burial in fine-grained marine sediments and permafrost conditions.

The find, announced publicly in 2007, was hailed as "spectacular" because it was the oldest such specimen by at least 40,000 years. That allowed for analysis of how they might have endured the period of climate change.

"This find tells us that the polar bear has the capacity to survive a warmer climate, such as we are experiencing now," said Ólafur Ingólfsson, a University of Iceland professor who led the excursion during an adjunct term at UNIS, at the time of the public announcement.

Media reports during the past week about the polar bear's ability to evolve during climate change occurred at about the same time photos of a cub and its mother stranded on a tiny iceberg in Svalbard were also getting widespread publicity. Eric Lefranc, a wildlife photographer who captured the bears on film during a cruise in Olga Strait, said a guide indicated the mother could probably swim the 12 miles to shore, but the cub would likely drown.

Such photos and indicated have been used commonly to illustrate the peril bears are facing from modern warming. But a vast majority of readers responding to the two stories didn't seem to have much sympathy.

"Why would not the polar bears be resilient to climate change now?" wrote one commenter claiming to be Dr. Alok Bhattacharyya of London. "Have they changed their lifestyle? Have the children polar bears been given mobile phones, ipods, etc. by their parents? Have they been chatting on Facebook for hours? If the polar bears have been running their lives as they always did, we do not need to worry too much about them."

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Mine 7 again facing closure if losses can't be stopped

Mine 7, which has operated for years at a loss, may shut down if performance does not improve, said Bjørn Arnestad, administrative director for Store Norske. The mine has repeatedly been threatened with closure since it opened in 1975 and Arnestad said it was the first question he received when becoming head of the company two years ago. But said the mine's deficit in 2009 was not large in relation to the company's overall earnings, and it is considered important to executives and board members. Annual production in the mine is about 75,000 tons of coal, one-third of which is used for Longyearbyen's power plant and the rest sold to Germany. The mine, with about 20 employees, has about five years' of production remaining at the current pace.

Industry says pollution study wrong, demands new one

A report showing a sharp rise in Svalbard's greenhouse gases is erroneous, should be withdrawn and a new study undertaken, according to mining, tourism and other industry officials. Soot and nitrogen oxides increased more than 50 between 2000 and 2007, and even steeper increases are predicted by 2025 without action, according to the report by Norwegian pollution researchers and The University Centre in Svalbard. A letter by Bydrift, Store Norske, Aeco and Pole Position states calculations in the report are incorrect, such as estimating cruise ships used 20,208 tons of fuel in 2007 when industry officials put the total at 7,764 tons. A Norwegian Climate and Pollution Agency official said they are still evaluating the five-page letter and potential response.

Man who wrecked van onto museum roof jailed, fined

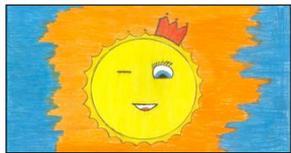
A 25-year-old Oslo man who stole a van from Huset in November and ended up flipping it onto the roof of the Spitsbergen Airship Museum has been sentenced to 30 days of conditional imprisonment, 95,000 kroner in fines and restitution, and the loss of his driver's license for 15 months.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Sunny, areas of low clouds. NE winds at 9 km/h. High -17C (-21C wind chill), low -21C (-22C wind chill).	Cold and increasing clouds. NNE winds at 4 km/h. High -18C (-29C wind chill), low -23C (-24C wind chill).	Mostly cloudy and cold. ESE winds at 9 km/h. High -18C (-23C wind chill), low -22C (-31C wind chill).	Cold, a little snow. ENE winds at 28 km/h. High -19C (-32C wind chill), low -26C (-39C wind chill).

Extended forecast: Sunday, sunny and cold -22C (-32C), -24C (-32C); Monday, cold with some clouds, -21C (-23C), -23C (-32C); Tuesday, cloudy and cold -19C (-32C), -25C (-39C); Wednesday, clouds diminishing late and cold, -19C (-28C), -19C (-28C).

Data provided by AccuWeather.com



This year's Solfestuka logo, above, is by fifth-grade student Jairah Shane Muyano. At right, sledgers prepare for last year's Ta Sjansen competition at Hiorthamn. Photos provided by Longyearbyen Lokalstyre.



New and traditional events see the light

SOLFESTUKA, from page 1

Solfestuka was voted the most important event of the year by 49 percent of 620 people in an online *Svalbardposten* poll conducted in January, eclipsing 17 percent for Dark Season Blues, 14 percent for Spitsbergen Rock and Polarjazz, and 6 percent for KunstPause.

Longyearbyen's three-and-a-half-month-long polar night officially ended Feb. 14, but the surrounding mountains keep most of the town in twilight. The sun is scheduled to shine on the steps of the old hospital outside Svalbard Church at 12:18 p.m. Monday, where hundreds typically gather each year for a symbolic celebration of the sun's return.

The festival begins at 11 a.m. Sunday with a liturgy at the church. The church will also host the first of numerous performances as the biblical story "The Woman At The Well" is presented by singer/actress Inger Lise Rypdal, with support from Marius Rypdal and Morten Reppesgård.

A new event, also on Sunday, is an evening focusing on Norwegian film. Acclaimed critics Per Haddal of *Aftenposten* and Martin Nordvik of *Adresseavisen* will lead a discussion at 5 p.m. at Huset, followed by screenings of "Nord" at 6 p.m. and "Jernanger" at 8 p.m.

Another new event is an ice skating party at the newly built outdoor rink next to Polarflokken kindergarten at 6 p.m. March 11. A featured band making their Svalbard debut is donkeyboy, with a free concert for students through high school at 5 p.m. March 10 and a general audience show at 9 p.m. at Brasseri Nansen.

"They are very popular, nominated for five Norwegian Grammy awards," Ødegård wrote. They "have been the support band for a-ha at their concerts in Britain before Christmas and are now also beginning to be known in other countries."

Traditional favorites include a youth talent competition at 5 p.m. March 9 at Brasseri Nansen and a variety show lampooning the community at 8 p.m. March 13 at Huset.

"This means large and small events throughout the last year – nothing is too small, nor too large," the schedule notes. "And no one can feel safe."

The most colorful event may be the Ta Sjansen sledding contest at 1 p.m. March 13 at Hiorthhamn, where participants vie for speed and decorative supremacy. A shuttle to the site is available for those without snowscooters.

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

Solfestuka schedule

Sunday, March 7

- 11 a.m.: Liturgy, "Light Of Life And Land." Svalbard Church.
- 5 p.m.: Discussion of Norwegian film with critics Per Haddal and Martin Nordvik. Huset.
- 6 p.m.: Movie: "Nord." Huset.
- 8 p.m.: Movie: "Jernanger." Huset.
- 8 p.m.: Performance "The Woman At The Well" by Inger Lise Rypdal, with Marius Rypdal and Morten Reppesgård. Svalbard Church.

Monday, March 8

- Noon: Return of the sun celebration. Old hospital steps outside Svalbard Church, with waffles and warm drinks inside at 1 p.m.
- 8 p.m.: Solquiz. Barentz Pub.

Tuesday, March 9

- 5 p.m.: Youth talent show. Brasseri Nansen.
- 7 p.m.: Evening Mass. Svalbard Church.
- 7 p.m.: Art exhibition by Kjell Nupen, marking the 15th anniversary of Galleri Svalbard.
- 8 p.m.: Solcafe music performances. Huset.

Wednesday, March 10

- 5 p.m.: Free donkeyboy youth concert. Brasseri Nansen.
- 6:30 p.m.: Photo exhibit "Svalbard Impressions – Arctic Dreams" by Bill M. Bruce. Svalbard Museum.
- 9 p.m.: donkeyboy concert. Brasseri Nansen.

Thursday, March 11

- 10:15 a.m.: Sun activities for youths. Crafts for ages 1-3 at Longyearbyen Library, Sledding and snow painting for ages 3-6 on hill behind Radisson Blu Polar SAS Hotel.
- 6 p.m.: Skating party. Rink outside Polarflokken kindergarten.
- 10 p.m.: Grand Island concert. Kroa.

Friday, March 12

- 9 p.m.: Solfest party for senior high students. Ungdomsklubb.
- 10 p.m.: The Graves concert. Kroa.

Saturday, March 13

- 1 p.m.: Ta Sjansen sledding competition. Hiorthhamn.
- 8 p.m.: Solfestrevyen variety show. Huset.
- 10 p.m.: Duel concerts, with Reidar Larsen and Arne Skage on one floor, and ORBO and The Longshots on another. Ages 20 and up.

What's up

March 4

7:30 p.m.: "Impressions From The Desert" presentation by Hilde Bergrem. The Svalbard resident was among 15 girls from 10 countries in Europe and the Middle East participating in a five-day desert walk and cultural dialogue. Free. Longyearbyen library.

March 7-13

Solfestuka 2010, celebrating the return of the sun to Longyearbyen. Performances, talent competitions, concerts, art exhibits and other activities. Greeting of the sun at noon March 8 at Skjæringa. Full schedule at left.

March 9

7 p.m.: Lent mass. Svalbard Church. Waffles and coffee at 7:30 p.m.

March 14

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

6 p.m.: Movie: "Cloudy With A Chance Of Meatballs," U.S. family film dubbed in Norwegian, ages 7 and up. Huset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Lourdes," Austrian/French/German drama, all ages. Huset.

March 16

5 p.m.: Gathering for Norwegian Church Relief. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Evening Mass for Lent. Svalbard Church.

March 18

2 p.m.: Board of cultural and leisure meeting. Næringsbygget 1, Tundra room.

6 p.m.: Bydrift board meeting. Næringsbygget 2, Smutthullet room.

March 19

9 a.m.: Board for early enterprise meeting. Næringsbygget 1, Tundra room.

6 p.m.: Movie premier: "How to Train Your Dragon," U.S. animated family film dubbed in Norwegian. Will also show March 21. Huset.

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:

- *Svalbard land rising due to melting*
- *Another huge ice break-off in Antarctica*
- *China wants to be major Arctic player*
- *Polar bear poo helps in superbug hunt*