



Sunny days in Svalbard again

The day, truth be told, wasn't all that different.

The skies were overcast and Longyearbyen was already getting more than 12 hours a day of "twilight," exceeding the sunrise/sunset duration in New York City. Even during a mass gathering at the penultimate moment of the first dawn after a four-month polar night, a scattering of people said they didn't feel a magic transformation.

"Maybe if the sun had come out," said Kate Johansen, hoisting her daughter, Benedicte, 3, one of the dozens of children wearing a plush circle of cloth sun rays around her neck.

But there's little doubt the crowd was in a celebratory mood that lasted throughout a week as a record attendance of more than 4,000 was tallied at concerts, theater performances, presentations, sledge races and other activities during the annual Solfestuka festival. Be it the dark, cold, desolation or other demons of winter, most people said there's something to look forward to the end of as summer approaches.

"There's a lot of wind in the winter," said Hanna Hays, 11, who performed a Thai dance with three friends during the festival's annual youth talent show.

It took a few days for the skies to clear and the sun to actually shine on Longyearbyen (just after 1 p.m. on March 13 is when the first rays hit the walkway in the town center). But by the



The Polargospel children's choir sings on the step of the old hospital building during the opening of Solfestuka on March 8. The sun, which locals say first shines on the step after the four-month polar night, remained behind the clouds all day.

end of the week dawn was approaching before 5 a.m. and the last dusk vanishing after 8 p.m. as the light returns faster than nearly anywhere else on Earth. Constant daylight will return

well before the "midnight sun" rises from April 19 to Aug. 24.

The darkness can cause depression, sleep

See SUN, page 2

Inside

Review: Tromsø Kunstforsyning, *Tur* page 4

Events calendar page 4

Weather forecast page 3

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM

SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

- **Polar bear policy talks in Tromsø**
- **Local man, 30, dies in avalanche**
- **Firms may need environmental OK**

English translations of these and other pillaged articles (OK, we owe them many thanks for allowing this) are at www.icepeople.net.

Airship museum takes flight

Couple seeks to tell full story of overlooked trio of expeditions from Svalbard to North Pole

As planetary conquests go, it wasn't anybody's finest hour.

The first successful flight over the North Pole came to an abrupt end when bad weather forced a trio of legendary explorers to land their airship well short of their intended destination of Paris. They brought their airship down in a tiny village in northern Alaska where the Inuit people greeted the strange object from the sky with indifference.

The locals then foiled recovery plans by stripping the aircraft for parts, leaving the explorers to quarrel in the world press about whose country deserved credit for the pole flyover. The feud resulted in one of them setting out as the sole leader of a subsequent flight that crashed, leading to his arrest and public disgrace after numerous people died in



Ingunn Løyning, left, and Stefano Poli examine a diary from a polar expedition featured at their new Spitsbergen Airship Museum.

the rescue operation – including another leader of the original journey.

Perhaps it's not surprising those close to the incident consider it an ill-documented and

See AIRSHIP, page 3

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

Editor

Mark Sabbatini

Copy editor

Kristan Hutchison

Psychiatrist

Irene Gallion

Mailing address

Icepeople
Vei 210 -2- 13
Longyearbyen, Svalbard
9170
Norway

Telephone

Noway: +47 41 51 46 38
U.S. +1 (970) 344-4559

E-mail

icepeople@yahoo.com

Web site

www.icepeople.net

Icepeople is published weekly on Tuesdays, with printed copies available free on a limited basis in Longyearbyen. Additional printed copies are available locally and by mail upon request. Charges are on an "at cost" basis.

Copyright stuff

Original contents of this publication can be reproduced for non-commercial purposes free of charge if *Icepeople* is credited as the source. The original writers, photographers and other contributors retain their rights to all published works.

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.



Members of Spitsbergen Revylag offer their satirical interpretation of local events during the past year during a performance at Huset on the final night of Solfestuka.

Week of celebration ends polar night

SUN, from page 1

deprivation and other symptoms of seasonal affective disorder, although not to the extent a full-time psychologist is in Longyearbyen for assistance. Some local residents, speaking informally, said there may be a lower ratio of cases in Svalbard because virtually everyone is busy with occupations or studies that are generally the only way to obtain permanent housing.

Anne Lise Klungseth Sandvik, production director of a variety stage show for Solfestuka, said idleness can be a problem for non-working spouses and, having a disability herself after breaking her hand, self-motivation is critical. "I think if I did not have all those cultural things to do I would be very lonesome," she said.

Solfestuka has celebrated the return of the sun since Longyearbyen's existence. Sunrise in the world's northernmost town with a population exceeding 1,000 also generally gets brief mention in newspapers worldwide. A day of festival activities was extended to the current weeklong lineup about 25 years ago.

This year's ceremonies started with a packed-beyond-capacity sunrise service at the Svalbard church (albeit at the normal 11 a.m. time), after which congregants and several hundred others gathered outside around the step of a hospital built in 1913. The hospital was burned by Russia during World War II, with the step being the only part of the structure to survive, and it has become the traditional gathering point where the first rays of sun – at least symbolically – return to Longyearbyen.

Locals took advantage of the week to spend ample time outdoors in other activities – fair weather or not – including most of the town's



A sled heads down Hiorthhamn fjord during the annual race at Solfestuka, this year featuring about 20 entrants. Photo by Roger Ødegård.

kindergarten-age children spending a morning sledding on a hill near The University Centre in Svalbard. The culmination saw hundreds make the trip by snowmobile to Hiorthhamn fjord for the annual sledding races, this year featuring about 20 entrants competing (to use the word loosely in some instances) for honors in speed and ornamentation.

Concerts by renowned bands from Norway, plus an opening night performance by the U.S. band Chatham County Line in a joint appearance with Norwegian singer Jonas Fjeld, took place most nights. The local rock band Schmeerenburgh used a Friday night concert to introduce their debut recording, a five-song EP titled "Longyear Brenner" (English translation: "Longyear is burning") that is described as "a twisted take on Svalbard's arctic pulse."

The most indoor enthusiasm may have been during a pair of amateur collaborations, beginning with the youth talent show at the Radisson SAS Polar Hotel. More than 200 parents and other observers, including a three-judge panel at a table, packed sardine-tight into a conference room to watch a dozen or so performances in front of star-studded curtains.

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

Polar flight museum overcomes own challenges

AIRSHIP from page 1

misunderstood part of history.

The new Spitsbergen Airship Museum in Longyearbyen is seeking to present the complete story of a trio of historic expedition flights originating in Svalbard. Two local residents spent years visiting and working with the eight countries involved in the journeys, assembling a tale from which each only has pieces.

"What I discovered when I came here is many people don't know much about the expeditions...and what people did know has not been enough because what is known about the expeditions has been in different languages and has not been translated," said Stefano Poli, co-founder of the museum with his partner Ingunn Løyning.

The museum is across the street from the Svalbard church in a building used first as a pig farm and then the Svalbard Museum for about 30 years until it relocated in 2006. Everyday operations at the airship museum began earlier this month after its grand opening last November. Those unable to visit in person can view hundreds of exhibit photos, historical narratives, and extensive information from other countries and organizations in Norwegian, English and Italian at the museum's Web site.

Expeditions featured at the museum include:

- Walter Wellman's unsuccessful attempt to fly over the North Pole in the airship "America" in 1907 and 1909.

- The first successful flyover of the Pole by Roald Amundsen, Lincoln Ellsworth and Umberto Nobile in the airship "Norge" in 1926 and the subsequent controversies.

- Nobile's attempted flyover in the airship "Italia" in 1928 and the rescue following his crash, which resulted in the death of Amundsen and others.

Devoting the museum to a specialized and relatively small portion of Svalbard's past was less about a personal interest in airships than the untold drama of the expeditions and their historic significance, Poli said.

"I think it was not so important whether it was by airship or by camel," he said. "These expeditions started here."

Amundsen, for instance, is a household name, but more for being the first to set foot at the South Pole than the subsequent Arctic flights from his homeland.



The interior of the Spitsbergen Airship Museum features aluminum covering the ceiling and walls that is designed to resemble ice and snow.

"I did not know there had even been an airship," said Løyning, who grew up in Bergen, referring to the "Norge" expedition. "I don't remember it being talked about in school. Once you understand the mission of 1926 you understand why it's not talked about."

Poli, a native of Milan, Italy, has worked for tour and research logistics companies in Svalbard since 1994, and currently manages the tour company Poli Arctici A/S. Løyning has worked for tour companies and operators since moving to Svalbard in 1998. They said serious work for the airship museum began in 2005, although tourist activities kept them from doing any work between February and August each year.

"Not even to answer e-mails," she said.

During the autumns they traveled for "short, very intense periods every year," Poli said, including visits to Italy to collect information and donations of exhibits from institutions and people connected to the airship expeditions. Løyning said she did extensive research at The National Library Of Norway and was surprised at how many artifacts remain from the journeys.

"It was a customary to throw things away, burn things down and make a run for the next thing," she said. "There was 10 to 15 times

what I expected to see."

In addition to the eight nations involved in the flights, Poli said they sought material from any other source they could think of, including eBay. Among the exhibits they said they value most are two pieces of the original logbook from the "Norge" and what they believe is a piece of the plane that killed Amundsen when it crashed.

Not everything went smoothly. Originally a new building for the museum was planned, either by the shore or near the center of town, but differences with Italian Roberto Sparapani resulted in his selling his ownership share in the project in 2007. Poli purchased the shares, some of which he sold to Løyning, at which point they decided to use the building vacated when the Svalbard Museum moved to The University Centre In Svalbard.

"The first idea was to build something smaller," Løyning said of the original design plans, but Sparapani was interested in a bigger facility. "When he pulled out we sat down and said 'What do we do now?' We didn't want to make a big monument. We wanted to make a museum. Quickly we decided we didn't want to do something ourselves."

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

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Heavy snow, 20-30 cm. NNW winds at 33 km/h. High -13C (-26C wind chill), low -19C (-26C wind chill).	Light snow. ENE winds at 11 km/h. High -12C (-16C wind chill), low -13C (-21C wind chill).	Cloudy and warmer, light snow. SSE winds at 6 km/h. High -7C (-8C wind chill), low -13C (-13C wind chill).	Cloudy, SE winds at 4 km/h. High -8C (-8C wind chill), low -11C (-14C wind chill).

Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy and light winds, -6C (-9C), -13C (-16C); Monday, cold and partly cloudy -19C (-21C), -24C (-24C); Tuesday, cloudy and cold, -19C (-22C), -24C (-29C); Wednesday, cloudy and cold, -18C (-24C), -21C (-30C).

Data provided by AccuWeather.com

Review: *Tur* an improvisational showcase that demands focus

"I don't find two sips of wine more delicious than one," a fictional assassin tells his nemesis, who's uncomfortable with his host's relative sobriety. It's a mentality listeners of a new album by a collection of northern Norway musicians will do well to adopt as their improvisational energy is expressed in a multitude of ways that's anything but comfortable.

"Tur" by the Tromsø Kunstforysning, led by longtime Norwegian trombonist Øystein Blix and cellist Bernt Simen Lund, soothes with classical strings one minute, agitates the next with harsh-timbre freeform interplay and marches to the beat of drums from around the world. Although generally mellow, this is music for those seeking an intellectual exercise instead of a background aphrodisiac for a dinner date.

"Trying to do something else while listening to this music is hard," Blix agreed in an interview. "You really don't know what is coming next, so you have to be all ears. You can relax and listen, but you can't wash dishes."

The album, released March 9, is promoted as "an idea of what improvised music can sound like at 70° north in 2009." The performances are somewhat dated, consisting of studio material from a 2000 session and a live performance in 2005. New electronics added to the mix during the past year help convey a contemporary presence. There's no audience noise or significant audio differences that distinguish the live and studio recordings.

Tromsø Kunstforysning was formed in 1999 based on concepts Blix learned at the Trondheim Music Conservatory, getting musicians from a range of genres to improvise together. Blix said the Tromsø ensemble goes beyond music, working with dancers, artists, and theater actors, which is one of the reasons the recordings haven't been released before.

"The CD has not been the top priority," he said. "The top priority has been working with other people improvising in many senses."

Work on the CD started in 2006, but was delayed when Blix lost 20 teeth in a bicycling accident. "I just played again for the first time a week ago in a live concert," he said.

A CD can't convey the ensemble's full concept, Blix said, so "the next project in three, four or five years will definitely have to be a DVD."

An album release concert is scheduled at 8 p.m. April 14 at the Rådstua Teaterhus in Tromsø. Among the performers is Japanese vocalist Sizzle Othaka, who appears on *Tur*'s live tracks. Blix said that appearance was an improvisation in itself after she learned about Tromsø's annual Northern Lights Festival.

"She sent a note and asked if she could come, and then the director of the festival was thinking about me and the Tromsø Kunstforysning because he couldn't think of anybody else to work with that kind of music on such short notice," he said.

Tur's compositions are solid and the spontaneous dialogue intelligent, in contrast to far too many modern improvisational albums possessing the discipline of a political panel shoutfest on cable TV. Density is on the sparse side, an enormous plus since it gives listeners space to interpret individual performances instead of trying to "relate" to conceptual clutter too distorted to be heard clearly.

The opening six-minute "Mother Nature" sets a deceptively smooth mood with some minimalist New Age instrumentation serving as a non-obtrusive delivery vehicle for Othaka's lightly wistful verses. Her light touch is appreciable in the context of the entire project, but listeners auditioning the track at the store may come away thinking the album is too tame.

Those who linger can hear the diversity and strength of *Tur* on the subsequent "Valse Vi," a shifting instrumental march cadence with three times the interaction and variety of "Mother Nature" in less than a third of the time.

The title track is an intriguing mix of frenetic African/early fusion drums, intense clipped lyrics from Othaka, and growled embellishments by Blix. Like the opening track it doesn't develop extensively, but the intensity makes it a superior listen.

Development isn't a problem on another extended track, "Fools Rush In," a Middle Eastern composition which Blix introduces with a progression of coarse narratives. Othaka and Blix then trade interactive and solo improvisations as the rhythm section of Nasra Ali Omar (percussion and electronics), Håvard Graff (piano) and Trond Sverre Hansen (drums) lay a foundation variable enough to maintain interest without distracting.

Subtle interactions of vocals, trombone and electronics reward the careful listener on the oddly named "Sizzle." Similarly quiet pieces are the best way to appreciate Lund's cello, including "To Fine Ii" and "Karikari," the latter closing the album on a harmoniously quaint classical/ambient note.

Tur's navigation between intellectual orchestration and eclectic world freeform makes it an album with limited audience appeal. Within those boundaries it delivers solidly with few disappointments and few revelational moments. It certainly has the potential to whet the appetite for experiencing the ensemble with visual artists performing at their full potential.



❄️❄️ ½ (out of four)

Links to audio, artist sites and more at www.icepeople.net

What's up

March 18

7:30 p.m.: Author Grete Smedal presents and signs his book "Longyearbyens Farger – Veien Videre" (translation: "Longyearbyen Colors – The Way Forward"), focusing on the history and future use of color in the town. Longyearbyen library.

March 19

2 p.m.: Meeting of the board for culture and leisure enterprise. Næringsbygget 3.

March 20

9 a.m.: Meeting of the board of enterprise growth. Næringsbygget 1.

March 22

11 a.m.: Familiegudstjeneste family service. Svalbard church.

7 p.m.: Movie: "The Fantastic History Of Benjamin Button." Huset.

7:30 p.m.: Photographer Ole Jørgen Liodden presents his book about nature photography with a digital camera. Svalbard Museum.

March 24

5 p.m.: Fast Action gathering, Svalbard Church.

7 p.m.: Meeting of the local board. Næringsbygget 3.

March 29

11 a.m.: Liturgy, Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Hest Er Best 2," Dutch children's film, Huset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "North," Norwegian comedy/drama, Huset.

March 31

Power meter Q1.

On the horizon

Schmeerenburgh: the world's northernmost rock band releases its first recording, the five-song EP *Longyear Brenner*.

The Nightmare Of Noah: Becoming ice zombies for a day to depict the dark side of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.

And more in the next issue March 31.