To believe that the governor can rescue people out, regardless of circumstances, is wrong. There is no guarantee for that.

- Per Andreassen, police lieutenant

Svalbard governor's office

Bearly aware:
Polar bear destroys two tents at poorly chosen campsite; group also had trouble with weapon

Geese grub:
Record flock a threat to tundra

Svalbard's Dark Side

Total solar eclipse offers historical thrill, but blizzards, blackouts and blunders can cloud experience

By MARK SABBATINI

Editor

There are many ways the sun can be blocked from view. For almost everyone in Svalbard this week, only one of them is good.

But the other ways may allow people such as Magnus Lönnebeen to share more illuminating tales about their experience during the total solar eclipse in Svalbard on Friday. Especially since the vast majority of a record non-cruise ship crowd may go home with cloudy memories due to an iffy weather forecast.

Lönnebeen, on the other hand, will be able to say he went for one of the wildest rides ever across Svalbard's ice-covered tundra. A massive dome tent he set up during the weekend as a group from Sweden in the background begins setting up their camp. At top right, the "diamond effect" of a total solar eclipse is seen through a gap in the clouds in Australia in 2012. At bottom right, Visit Svalbard Director Ronny Brunvoll offers eclipse and accommodation information to passengers arriving Tuesday at Svalbard Airport.

Eclipsed by crowds? Try these

By MARK SABBATINI

Editor

You're starving, but every eatery is packed and the lines at the supermarket are endless. It's -20C and windy, and your "cold-weather" gear isn't. You desperately need to send an e-mail or post on your blog, but every public wi-fi network is hopelessly overloaded.

A record number – by far – of overnight visitors will be in Longyearbyen from Wednesday through this weekend, with those numbers increasing considerably more when several planeloads of same-day visitors arrive for Friday's eclipse. People hoping to do almost anything practical or fun quickly and/or on a whim are almost certainly deluding themselves.

Unless.

Being abnormal types, we'll be steering clear of most of the beaten paths. For those wanting to go home saying they were deviants in Svalbard, here's some tips:

Groceries: Longyearbyen Thai Shop

This small store is located in the small Longyearbyen Thai Shop

No wheels? Run errands or take a sightseeing tour using one of 25 new communal kicksleds.
Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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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.

Not exactly the hottest red-light district, but…

Benjamin Vidmar shares his affection with Elin Amundsen outside of Karls-Berger Pub on Saturday afternoon. Vidmar offered free hugs for two hours as a project for Elos' Transformation Games, which seeks participants trying to "transform the world around you." "The Action went much better than I expected and mostly everyone gave a smile when they read my sign," Vidmar wrote in one of a series of updates at the Elos website (tinyurl.com/kw26zaw). "I also noticed that once a person gave me a hug they would start to speak with me. While they were speaking with me, then it would be much easier for others to come up and give me a hug." Although he said he felt uncomfortable and only got couple of takers during the first 15 minutes, the final tally was "Dogs-1 Girls-4 Boys-8 Ladies-24 Guys-19"

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

Remember that guy who earlier this year wrote the greatest article we've ever seen about Polarjazz even though we didn't understand a word of it? He's back and devoting his pen (or whatever he uses) to another sketchy profile, this time focusing on The University Centre in Svalbard (tinyurl.com/k6ppzow). We didn't get his permission to reproduce a tiny image of his work back in February (tinyurl.com/nfmd2bx), but we did finally reach him shortly after deciding to pilfer the image at the right if we struck out again because his stuff is too cool for people not to know about. It helped that this time we were able to learn who he is and where lots more of his work can be seen. Aurélien Froment, who goes by the pen name of Aurel, drew his sketches and accompanying essays of Svalbard for Le Monde, but has penned comics, essays and other works about jazz, politics and other subjects for more than a decade. While it's all in French, some projects

Icesheet

We pitifully begged for permission this time: Not only did he consent, but he didn't threaten to sue for illegally printing his work in February – including his Polarjazz feature – are supplemented by content such as music and interviews in English. The full tour is at www.lesitedaurel.com … If we were picking Aurel's next Svalbard sketch we'd send him to Barentsburg to see what the Soviet-era settlement is plotting these days as Russia is "completely militarizing its Arctic frontier," to quote a new analysis by the Heritage Foundation. A map showing sites where Russia is fortifying its military Arctic bases reveals several in the regions surrounding Svalbard to the south, but nothing in the archipelago itself. While that's hardly a shock, it might offer some relief to analysts who suggested Svalbard might be the next Ukraine since Russia has never accepted Norway's sovereignty claims in the area. Then again, maybe the invasion is one of those top-secret things and the map is a diversion.
Three men rescued by chance after two-day search; they failed to provide details about their trip

By MARK SABBATINI

Three men forced to spend 30 hours in a snow pit, above, to a rescue helicopter late Wednesday night. At right, the snow pit is observed from the air during the search, which was conducted two helicopters much of Tuesday and all of Wednesday. The men did not provide details about where they would be traveling and when, and did not have emergency communications equipment. Photos by Trond Oslen / Sysselmannen.

The men, stranded on Königsbergbreen, tried to search on foot for other snowmobilers in the area, but were forced to dig the snow pit when a storm hindered their progress.

Although they weren’t specific about their plans, they were expected to return to Longyearbyen either Tuesday night or Wednesday morning. The governor’s office was alerted to their absence by the men’s employer at 2:11 p.m. Tuesday, but a search by two rescue helicopters until evening proved futile.

The search continued Wednesday and the men were finally located at about 11 p.m. when an observer spotted a red flash through a break in the clouds.

The helicopter saw a flash of light and then flares,” the statement noted. “They had sought rescue in a very large area where the two helicopters had previously missed their signals.”

The men were brought to Longyearbyen Hospital for examination, but suffered no serious harm, according to the governor.

“The governor urges people who are traveling to provide clear details about where they are going and when they will be back,” the statement noted.

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

30 hours stranded in a snow pit

Three men rescued by chance after two-day search; they failed to provide details about their trip

By MARK SABBATINI

Three men forced to spend 30 hours in a snow pit on a glacier in east Spitsbergen when their snowmobiles broke down were rescued Wednesday night after a person in a search helicopter spotted their shelter by chance, according to The Governor of Svalbard.

“They did not bring a satellite phone, emergency beacon or VHF radio,” a statement from the governor noted. “It was also unclear what route they were following and when they would be back.”

The men, all Swedish and in their 30s, departed Longyearbyen last Monday, but one of their snowmobiles developed an engine failure shortly afterward. They drove the remaining two snowmobiles to a trappers’ cabin at Agardh, where they spent the night.

“On Tuesday they were going to return to Longyearbyen, but they experienced problems with the last two snowmobiles,” the governor’s statement noted.

The men, stranded on Königsbergbreen, tried to search on foot for other snowmobilers in the area, but were forced to dig the snow pit when a storm hindered their progress.

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There’s more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.
SUBSTITUTE, from page 1

shopping center directly across the street from

the Radisson Blu Polar Hotel, but it's remark-

ably overlooked for such a prime location. It's

easily possible to exist well on both regular

and exotic foodstuffs from frozen pizza to canned

jackfruit (and the huge diversity of instant noo-

dles might be paradise for campers), and the

prices are usually competitive or even lower

than Svalbardbutikken. What's more it's open

seven days a week during essentially the same

hours (it closes an hour earlier on Saturdays).

Dining: Svalbard Catering

Located in the same shopping center as the

Thai shop, there isn't a place in Longyearbyen

offering a wider range of dining options at very

reasonable prices. Couples wanting a packed

meal (hot or cold) for a date, small groups

needing lunch fixings for day trip and large

groups wanting a tapas buffet for a post-adven-
ture bash can find plenty of fare from hearty

basics to exotic nibbles. But there are two

caveats: Everything is take-out only and they

are not accepting orders Thursday through Sat-

urday due to the existing volume of group or-
ders. Also, anything more than a simple meal

for a couple of people will require at least a

day's advance notice (groups require two).

Free warm clothes, souvenirs and other

useful things: Bruktikken.

This tiny "thrift" store is packed with use-

ful stuff from expedition parks to snowmobile

boots to kitchen supplies, plus Svalbard-themed

items such as books, DVDs, mugs and t-shirts.

Best of all, everything is free (but they will

gratefully accept donations). But there's also a

big caveat at this place: it's only open Tuesdays

from 4 to 7 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to

1 p.m. But they have been known to accommo-

date "desperate" people via their Facebook

page (www.facebook.com/bruktikken).

Free wi-fi: Svalbardhallen

This recreation hall is about a two-kilome-
ter walk from the town center and there's are

fees to use its facilities. But if you're desperate

even to need to send an e-mail or blog post

in the cold, the signal from the password-free

wi-fi network does extend to the parking lot.

That might change if hundreds of people gather

and abuse the privilege, so restraint is advised.

Touring (and taxis): Kicksledsharing

See those green things scattered around

town that look a bit like dogsleds without any

dogs around to pull them? Welcome to Sval-

bard-style sustainable communal transport. The

tourism bureau Visit Svalbard put 25 new kick-

sleds at the public's disposal a few months ago,

which have proven popular with students from

elementary to graduate school levels. They're a

great way of getting groceries to whatever's

serving as your home base and a change of

pace from a walking tour. Just don't necessarily

expect a sled you take to the store to be there

when you come out.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net

for the complete story.
A map of Longyearbyen, at left, shows shaded areas during Friday's total solar eclipse. The best viewing areas will be in areas outside the town center such as Adventdalen. At top right, an artist's depiction shows the planned deployment of cameras that will capture the eclipse "from the edge of space" for online viewing. Those wanting a more organic experience can pick up free protective viewing glasses, at right center, from The University Centre in Svalbard beginning Thursday. At bottom right, a Norse legend about eclipses is shown in J. C. Dollman's "The Wolves Pursuing Sol and Mani" (1909).

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

In addition to shade and blindness, there's giant sky wolves to worry about during the solar eclipse

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Yeah, it's important to know where to get glasses to view the eclipse safely and where to stand to stay out of the shade. But there's also the giant sky wolves and distressed ancient Chinese emperors to worry about.

A barrage of practical information, including viewing and safety tips, is being offered to those in Svalbard for Friday's eclipse. Tourism officials are handing out comprehensive brochures to arriving airline passengers as soon as they enter the airport terminal, similar information is stacked high at local entities such as hotels and government agencies, and a preview presentation where viewing glasses will be available is scheduled at 7 p.m. Thursday at The University Centre in Svalbard.

A seemingly endless amount of information is also online, which may also be the only way those on the ground see the eclipse if they miss the two minutes the sun is fully covered by the moon due to cloud cover. News agencies, science organizations and companies seeking publicity are all offering live and/or innovative video options.

Perhaps the most detailed analysis of viewing locations is being provided by Michael Zeiler, co-publisher of the website www.greatamericaneclipse.com, which is covering such events in advance of a total solar eclipse in the U.S. He states one of the worst places to be is in the town of Longyearbyen itself.

"This is a mountainous area and the sun will only be about 11 degrees high during the total solar eclipse," we wrote in the analysis at tinyurl.com/o4mnzsv. "Most of the area inside Longyearbyen, the only sizable settlement in Svalbard, will not be able to see the total solar eclipse. It is critical for residents and eclipse chasers to be able to find locations from which to see totality."

Fortunately, this is one instance where following the crowd will lead to one of the better viewing areas a short walk from the town center. Several organizations are building support camps with facilities such as warming tents on the plains of Adventdalen just east of UNIS.

Those seeking the protective viewing glasses from UNIS can get a jump on the seminar crowd since the university will begin distributing them at the reception desk at 8:30 a.m. Thursday. A person may pick up one pair of glasses for each person in their household, including visitors, and they will be available for 29 kroner at Svalbard Museum if the supply at UNIS runs out.

Glasses have already been distributed free to all school and kindergarten students in Longyearbyen.

If the glasses are unnecessary due to clouds, one of the more novel online viewing options is being offered by Zero2infinity, a Spanish stratospheric ballooning company. It is planning to "to launch a payload of tiny cameras... (and) footage from the six cameras – each facing a different direction – will be stitched together after the flight, creating a 'spherical video,' of the eclipse viewed from the edge of space," according to Air and Space magazine (tinyurl.com/mogf4hk).

But while clouds may make those in Svalbard miserable, many folks to the south are fearing a far more negative experience.

Numerous experts, including one who notes those Chinese emperors regarded eclipses as an ominous sign, are predicting the eclipse could cause "an unprecedented test for the European grid" due to a large reliance on solar power. Also, the Khaleej Times, noting Norse legend declares eclipses have something to do with two giant wolves roaming the sky, reports the eclipse is occurring during a "supermoon," which is when the moon is at its closest point to Earth.

"This, and the moon’s alignment with the sun, will add to the gravitational pull on the seas — creating what is literally a high point in the 18-year lunar cycle," the newspaper notes in the article at tinyurl.com/moj94nh.

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

Arctic horror story just a drill to keep Lance crew from getting lax due to 'smooth' research trip so far

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

"This is snow pit team; we have a person in the water!"

Scientists on a voyage already plagued with emergencies involving unstable sea ice hear that chilling cry last week and scrambled to respond with life-saving quickness. Outside observers captivated by the expedition's dramatic sea stories may have feared the worst about the alert on Friday the 13th.

It wasn't until several paragraphs later, after "the unlucky guy is safely evacuated from the ice, and is taken good care of in the ship hospital," outsiders learned "fortunately for us, this was just a drill."

Researchers and crew members aboard the Lance research vessel participated in the drill because, "after nine weeks on the ice, the project has not had any serious accidents or injuries," wrote Håvard Hansen, the expedition's cruise leader, in the project's blog (tinyurl.com/otyvd6e). That's a relative term for folks aboard a ship frozen into the sea ice at about 82 degrees north latitude, since they nearly lost a bunch of equipment a few weeks ago when he ice around the ship collapsed and a polar bear damaged key equipment shortly after they froze into a new location.

"The risk is now that people tend to lower their guard, and get a bit more relaxed," Hansen wrote. "We are more likely to take chances and opportunities we wouldn't even consider during our first week on the ice."

While lax attitudes about being submerged might seem improbable, the participants clearly aren't totally averse to being submerged and taking a light-hearted approach to the sea ice. Marthe Sandbu, a marine biology student aboard the ship, wrote in a blog post a few days before the drill that "a day in the life" can include activities such as hot tub parties and making art sculptures out of ice cores in addition to the serious science work.

The Lance expedition was also presented to world leaders Tuesday as part of a "Arctic. The Canary in the Mine" conference in Paris. The gathering offered a preview of information and issues that will be discussed during the climate summit in France this summer.

Getting high on the Lance tempts royal, global leaders

Crown prince to visit ship in the ice; those afar get whiff of goals in Paris before climate summit

The Lance research expedition, already hailed as a crowning achievement, will soon be able to make that claim literally.

Crown Prince Haakon and Crown Princess Mette-Marit, plus Climate and Environment Minister Tine Sundtoft, are scheduled to visit the ship frozen into the sea ice north of Svalbard from April 21-23.

"I think this research project where a number of Norwegian and foreign researchers are participating will mean a lot for increased climate understanding," Sundtoft said in a press release issued Tuesday. "It is important to get the latest knowledge about what less ice means for climate."

The trio will also participate in a field excursion in Longyearbyen where students at the University Center in Svalbard will present their fieldwork on climate and environmental projects.

Crown prince to visit ship in the ice; those afar get whiff of goals in Paris before climate summit

No dirt on these climate scientists: Participants of the Lance research expedition take a break in the ship's hot tub, left, earlier this month. At right, twilight illuminates a sculpture made of ice cores.
Because folks into Svalbard are so awesome at it, it's the

g et smart or get naked telethon

For six years we've been bringing you skewed news and views about the world's coolest place for free. But we can't pay for this out of our rapidly thinning pocketbooks forever, so we've bitten the bullet and added donation and advertising stuff to our newly redesigned website. Consider this our polite, not-resorting-to-porn-ads plea to consider "subscribing" or allowing thousands of readers worldwide to learn about your wares and talents.

Maybe you've noticed our new site, which actually offers extra content as well as breaking articles about stuff that can be important like storms

Or that a lot of our "real" newspapers have been larger in size lately

Um, isn't there supposed to be an incentive for my generous contribution?

Our idiotic rants and wordsmithing aren't enough? OK, we can kinda not resent that...

Carrot: Got something needing profession editing or translating, or a Mac needing first-aid? We're paid pros at it.

Stick: Do you really want to see this guy get desperate enough to expose more flesh? Save the therapy fees and donate instead.

Want more details or to hear this groveling in person? Contact our editor at marksabbatini@yahoo.com or 4151 4638.
Think that rental is costly?

Visitors may get the most costly – and inedible – meal of their lives with the wrong kind of light

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

For the benefit of all this week's visitors: two of last year's big news stories were the installation of a high-tech fire alarm system and how it got a lot of early morning workouts and how it got a lot of early morning workouts from locals who fell asleep while cooking something after a late night of drinking.

And while firefighters, police and fellow tenants merely suffered the misery of bring roused and forced outside, the culprits may have as well have set their wallets on fire since they were hit with fines of about 11,000 kroner.

The spate of fires, apparently due to the closure of the last local after-pub-hours eatery, was the first item detailed in the Longyearbyen Fire Department's annual report for 2014. The fire department responded to 181 callouts, up from the 155 that set a record in 2013, eight of which were the result of kitchen mishaps. None of the latter caused serious structural damage.

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

Early visitors hit hard by storm

BLACKNESS, from page 1

a communal gathering place for a Swedish group he is helping lead took to traveling when it was hit by gale-forced winds as he was sleeping it in alone in the wee morning hours.

"I started hearing some poles breaking," he said, estimating the wind carried tent more than 100 meters along the campsite near Svalbard Airport. "The tent itself didn't break other than a small ring that holds the poles."

Lönneben, whose extensive experience includes an Everest expedition in 1991, was far better prepared than most for the adverse conditions. He spent much of his time before the group's arrival Monday making new poles and "last night I slept in another tent."

Winds from the storm eventually reached 90 km/h Sunday night and Monday morning, with a combination of snow, ice and rain. A series of power outages hit Longyearbyen from early Sunday evening through Monday morning, with outlaying areas such as Adventdalen and Svalbard Airport (and the campsite) suffering the longest outages due to the inability of workers to reach those locations.

The outages, apparently caused by icing on power lines, saw some visitors exposed to the elements handle it well while those indoors weren't as sturdy.

"The English group staying here is fine," said Juliane Opielka, the attendant at the campsite. "They went to bed early because their tent needed to be weighted down and they had a polar bear guard."

What's up

March 9-24
"The Stormy Sun and the Northern Lights," free course open to the public. Participants register at first class at 6:15 p.m. March 9, UNIS.

March 17
7 p.m.: Longyearbyen Photo Club annual meeting. Kapp Wijk, UNIS.
7 p.m.: Discussion about visit to the Middle East to assist Palestinians in occupied territories by Priest Leif Magne Helgesen and Longyearbyen School Headmaster Anne Søvold Vikanes. Svalbard Church.
7 p.m.: Community meeting to discuss Longyearbyen Community Council's proposed land-use plan. UNIS.

March 18

March 19
7 p.m.: Solar Eclipse Warm-up w/ talks and tips from space experts. UNIS.
7:30 p.m.: Solcafe dinner and traditional sing-a-long. Huset.

March 20
11:00-11:13 a.m.: Total solar eclipse. Follow developments live online at tinyurl.com/o79v2b2.

March 22
11 a.m.: Mass and annual meeting. Svalbard Church.

March 23
8 p.m.: Trivia quiz. Barentz Pub.

March 24
7 p.m.: Evening Mass and fireplace social. Svalbard Church.

March 25

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:
- Nordic Council closes offices in Russia
- Canada gets new ships to protect Arctic
- Frozen Finns flipping out over fatbikes
- Yet even more proof Svalbard yeti a hoax