



THE LAST DEGREE, PART 2: A SPLINTERED START



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAMP BARNEO

The first workers parachute into Camp Barneo, top left, building a landing strip on the ice where the first flight, bottom left, lands this week. But expeditions trying to arrive and depart the camp were frozen in place when a large crack, right, made the airstrip unusable.

Schedules on ice

Weather, runway crack freeze flights to and from Camp Barneo

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

When workers and visitors said they were hoping for a break in the miserable conditions, this probably isn't what they meant.

Camp Barneo workers struggled just parachuting onto a suitable ice floe and digging an airstrip on the "difficult" surface, missing their scheduled opening Friday. Visitors, including Britain's Prince Harry, spent days cooling their heels in "knockdown" winds in Longyearbyen, fretting about tight itineraries and a domino-like chain of delays.

But all seemed to be getting on track early this week as the first flight touched down at 6 p.m. Monday. The prince began his ski

expedition to the North Pole with a group of wounded soldiers and a team of Russian scientists became the first researchers to arrive.

"Soon operations at the base will be going along as scheduled," wrote an employee in the blog for the camp at 89 degrees north.

Another ski expedition was on its way to Barneo on Wednesday (April 6, reflecting a delayed press time). But halfway there, the plane turned around and the team found itself back in Longyearbyen.

"The runway broke," said Dirk Jensen, a guide with the expedition by PolarExplorers.

Headlines such as "Will he miss the royal wedding?" streamed from the British press

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Lots for food, a bit for booze

Groceries cost 20 percent more in Svalbard than the mainland, but alcohol and rent much cheaper

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

Sure, product prices are exorbitant, but it's not like there's been an abundance of it with all the cancelled flights during the past couple of months.

Transportation issues are, of course, the primary reason fruit costs 60 percent more in Svalbard than the mainland, according to a new report from Statistics Norway. Overall grocery prices in 2010 were about 20 percent higher than the mainland's, a seven percent increase compared to 2007.

Fruits of the vine, on the other hand, continue to get relatively cheaper.

"The most significant price difference in 2010 was for the group, alcoholic beverages and tobacco, where prices were 68 percent lower in Svalbard," the agency notes. The gap was 65 percent in 2007.

Prices of all consumer goods are 17 percent lower overall in the archipelago than the mainland but, as with food and alcohol, there huge discrepancies in some categories.

Transportation in Svalbard costs are 30 percent lower than the mainland, and housing, fuel and power 18 percent lower. Education is 3 percent higher, the only category other than food to

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New coal mine OK'd by governor



HALVARD R. PEDERSEN / SYSSELMANNEN

Store Norske hopes to open a new coal mine at Lunckefjell, seen here from the west, in the spring of 2013. Svalbard's governor is recommending the project if the company follows strict guidelines to restore the area.

Permit for Store Norske contains strict conditions for operations and restoration of environment

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

Allowing Store Norske to operate a new coal mine at Lunckefjell is being recommended by Svalbard's governor, if the company follows a strict list of environmental conditions.

The site just north of the Svea mine contains more than eight million tons of coal, about three to four years of the total production

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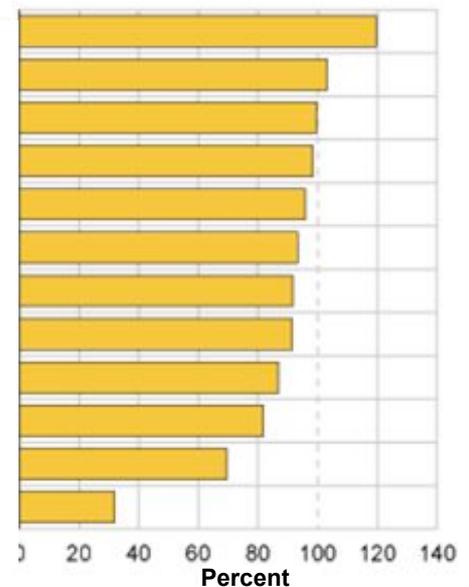
When we screw up you'll know about it – on the front page. One of the big complaints about newspapers is they tend to bury corrections and clarifications deep inside where few people who read the original article see them. If we need to fix something, an alert box on the front page will state what story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

Svalbard prices in 2010, by category (mainland = 100)

Food and non-alcoholic drinks
Education
Furniture and household items
Postal and telecommunications services
Health care
Hotels and restaurants
Culture and leisure activities
Other goods and services
Clothes and shoes
Housing, power and fuel
Transportation
Alcohol and tobacco



STATISTICS NORWAY

Living in Svalbard cheap, eating isn't

COSTS, from page 1

exceed the mainland's average. Furniture, household items, postage and telecommunication services in Svalbard were at or slightly below mainland costs.

"Two important factors explain much of the price difference between Svalbard and the mainland," the Statistics Norway report states. "First of all, households in Svalbard are exempt from VAT and excise duties in connection with the procurement of goods and services. Residents also enjoy the many benefits of subsidized housing."

"High transport costs and other additional costs associated with the procurement of goods and services, on the other hand, pulls in the opposite direction and reduces some of the price difference."

In the groceries category, the biggest price differences are for essential food groups like fruits, dairy products, vegetables and bread, which are respectively 60, 34, 32 and 16 percent higher in Svalbard. The smallest differ-

ences are for non-alcoholic beverages, sugar, jam, chocolate and other sweets.

Svalbardbutikken's former management promised in 2007 the price of fresh food would decline. Morten Helliksen, the store's current administrative director, said in January some factors such as supplier and shipping costs are out of the store's control. He said some tropical fruits more than doubled in price, but a *Svalbardposten* investigation showed prices for common fruits such as apples and oranges rose by about a third. For all of Noway, fruit prices decreased by 5.7 percent and vegetable prices increased two percent.

Clothing and footwear costs are 13 percent lower in Svalbard, but residents don't always take advantage, often due to limited selection.

"Purchasing patterns also show that households in Svalbard largely bought clothes and shoes through online shopping and a visit to the mainland," the report notes.

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

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

With the British press following every (non) movement by Prince Harry during the past week or so, the long delays resulted in some wonderful contributions to "pack journalism." They discovered Svalbard's drastic ozone loss this spring, a story that broke elsewhere a few weeks back. Also, the reliance on "pool" and wire reports made for entertaining repetition. A search for "Spitsbergen" in Google News revealed about 90 publications using the headline "Prince's Arctic adventure underway," followed by the exact same story. After that is "Prince Harry emerges as cool and fun face of monarchy," used identically by about 20 publications. ... Since we're doing a series about Barneo and the North Pole, time for one of our favorite guilty indulgences: checking

out Wikiwars for their entires. The relatively short Barneo entry is tame enough, although until recently it stated equipment "waste away" from the ice at the end of the season (it now reads equipment "are removed"). The real heat is at the North Pole, so to speak. A back-and-forth was fought recently with someone insisting on the inclusion of "it is owend bye russia ok reece." Similar, if more subtle, was attempting to edit the opening to read "North Pole, Canada." Rival territorial claims to the Pole are nothing new on Wiki or in the real world, but another "contributor" thinks he has the neutral answer: "Rumour has it that Santa Claus lives here. However his underwater base has not been located yet, but the U.S. Military is on the case." Then there's the (very brief) most recent change: "fuch you."



STORE NORSKE

A new mine at Lunckefjell, circled in red, will be north of Svea if approved by the Ministry of Justice.

Company hopes to open mine in 2013

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in Svalbard at current levels, according to company estimates. The company is looking to expand coal mining and further tap other resources such as gold as existing coal supplies are projected to run out in about five to ten years.

"Exploitation of the deposit will be a natural continuation of the current mining operations in Svea," the company said in a prepared statement.

The development of Lunckefjell is scheduled to begin in spring 2012 with the establishment of a road and other infrastructure. Store Norske hopes to begin building a road and other infrastructure to support the new mine in spring of 2012, and begin operations in winter of 2013.

The governor's recommendation contains restrictions to ensure compliance with the Svalbard Environmental Protection Act and guidelines from Parliament's recent strategic plan for the area, according to a prepared statement released this week.

"Included, among other things, are a full restoration of the landscape and establishing the site without heavy oil," the governor's statement notes.

Store Norske must also limit the spread of

dust, follow "stringent" rules for chemical use and emissions, conduct good surveillance and reporting, and not disturb sensitive wildlife or pollute Nordenskiöld Land national park.

The permit also allows the establishment of two emergency exits to the mine in the national park, two daily landings by helicopter for up to 30 days for construction workers, and land transportation on frozen and snow-covered ground in a scooter-free area to build the infrastructure. Wildlife restoration must take place after construction is complete.

The Ministry of Justice will make a final decision on the recommendation. Of 21 statements submitted to the governor during the commenting period, 12 had questions about the environmental impact analysis, Store Norske's application or the implementation of the project.

Some environmental officials and members of Parliament oppose the mine, arguing Longyearbyen can be economically viable without further mining.

Mining represents slightly more than 25 percent of Svalbard's employment, a decline from recent years when it exceeded 30 percent. But it remains by far the dominant industry, with tourism and construction each representing roughly 10 percent.

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

LNS: No layoffs of any Svea workers due to contract feud

No employees of LNS Spitsbergen will lose their jobs regardless of the outcome of a contract dispute with Store Norske about mining support operations at Svea. Store Norske has terminated the contract effective Sept. 1 in the wake of criminal charges against its former administrative director for making lucrative agreements in exchange for personal benefits. LNS is challenging the termination in court, leaving about 60 Svea workers uncertain about their future. "We will offer people a job, either in Longyearbyen or LNS Group (projects on the mainland)," said Ann Pedersen, LNSS' administrative director. About 40 LNSS employees currently work in Longyearbyen. Pedersen there are not enough existing vacancies in the city for all of its Svea employees, but mainland positions include support for Greenland and Antarctica projects.

Leaving outside lights during daylight to result in fine

Fines of 500 kroner for Longyearbyen residents leaving outdoor lights on during the daylight season will go into effect June 1, said Marianne Aasen, general manager of Bydrift, the city's utility agency. "We do it to save power and bring down coal use," she said. The new policy will apply between April 1 and Oct. 1 in future years. Employees will also monitor use of engine block heaters, disconnecting those plugged in as temperatures increase. Aasen said the cost of monitoring and enforcement will ultimately result in savings due to reduced energy use. Bydrift is also pursuing other efficiency measures such as replacing existing street bulbs with LED lights, and lighting and ventilation systems in their buildings that better control their use.

Ice cave reopened to public

The entrance to the ice cave on Longyearbyen is open to the public again after being closed earlier this year by Spitsbergen Travel due to vandalism, litter, smoking and urination. The problem was ruining guided tours to the area, said Tore Hoem, the company's production manager. She said the entrance will be closed again if problems continue.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy. NW winds to 8 km/h. High -9C (-18C wind chill), low -14C (-20C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. ESE winds to 5 km/h. High -15C (-24C wind chill), low -18C (-27C wind chill).	Cloudy. E winds at 4 km/h. High -16C (-24C wind chill), low -21C (-31C wind chill).	Snow. E winds at 4 km/h. High -14C (-22C wind chill), low -19C (-38C wind chill).
Sunrise: 4:33a Sunset 9:33p	Sunrise: 4:24a Sunset 9:43p	Sunrise: 4:14a Sunset 9:52p	Sunrise: 4:04a Sunset 10:02p
Extended forecast: Sunday, snow, -14C (-20C), -18C (-27C), light 18:19h; Monday, snow, -12C (-18C), -15C (-23C), light 18:41h; Tuesday, snow ending, -13C (-19C), -17C (-24C), light 19:05h; Wednesday, p. cloudy, -14C (-20C), -18C (-25C), light 19:29h.			
Data provided by yr.no			



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Members of the Arctic Fox Mission fight the elements Saturday while returning to Longyearbyen from an overnight shakedown trip in preparation for their week-long ski expedition to the North Pole.

Early struggles continue at Barneo

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as they pondered the latest setback to Prince Harry's Arctic adventure. The worries may be a bit premature – he is scheduled to be the best man at Prince William's wedding to Kate Middleton on April 29.

Workers at Barneo, on the other hand, are facing another immediate obstacle in a season full of them despite just starting.

Constructing the airstrip wasn't easy despite having two tractors that were dropped by parachute after the workers landed. Three people drive the machines in shifts, according to the blog, but "the ice is described as 'difficult' – much of the work has to be done with ice shovels."

If workers are lucky the airstrip will heal itself, but nobody's expecting that the way things are going so far.

"The chances that the crack will close back up – and do so evenly – are pretty low, though in our experience even this is not impossible," the blog notes.

"To add insult to injury, the weather is against us once more. The wind changed directions and picked up (and) a blizzard began. We can't send the helicopters out to look for a new

location, so we will sit tight, watch the ice, and wait for conditions to improve."

Sitting tight is an increasing concern for visitors paying large amounts of money to go to the North Pole, with many having firm deadlines to return home. Most still have a resigned humor, realizing precise scheduling isn't a realistic expectation.

"The baby's due in six weeks, so I've got five-and-a-half," said Nigel Clark, 38, a London resident who arrived in Longyearbyen this week to run the annual North Pole Marathon, originally scheduled for Thursday.

Expeditions spend their time in Longyearbyen on "shakedown" activities such as learning to pack sleds and taking overnight ski trips to test the worthiness of their gear.

"The first couple of times we do this it will probably seem like a maze of 'how are we going to get all of this into there?'" said Keith Heger during an orientation session Thursday at Spitsbergen Guesthouse for members of the Arctic Fox Mission expedition, being led by the U.S.-based PolarExplorers.

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

About the series:
'The Last Degree' follows workers, researchers and expeditions at Camp Barneo during the 10th anniversary of the ice community.



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE



COURTESY OF CAMP BARNEO

Keith Heger, above left, shows participants with the Arctic Fox Mission how to pack a sled Friday at Spitsbergen Guesthouse. Above right, workers at Camp Barneo use shovels to help construct an airstrip on the ice floe since two tractors are unable to smooth much of the 'difficult' surface.

What's up

April 6

8 p.m.: Movie: "Mennesker i Solen," Norwegian comedy, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

April 8

6 p.m.: Movie: "Rio" (3D), U.S. animated/comedy, all ages. Kulturhuset.

April 9-10

Trapper's Trail Sled Dog Race from Longyearbyen to Bikkjebu and back. Registration deadline April 6. More information at www.trapperstrail.blogspot.com.

April 10

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

8 p.m.: Movie: "Änglagård - Alle Gode Ting er Tre," Swedish drama/comedy, all ages. Kulturhuset.

April 12

7 p.m.: Waffle/fireplace gathering. Svalbard Church.

April 13

8 p.m.: Movie: "I Am Number Four," U.S. sci-fi/thriller, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

April 14

Noon: Debut of "baby" cinema, with "Änglagård - Alle Gode Ting er Tre." Dimmer screen and lower volume, with care and feeding of infants and young children allowed. Kulturhuset.

6 p.m.: Board of City Operation Authority meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

April 17

11 a.m.: Palm Sunday Mass with confirmation. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Amors Baller," Norwegian comedy, all ages. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Norwegian Wood," Japanese drama, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

April 18

Easter Mass in Ny-Ålesund.

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:

- *Barents Sea oil strike seen as major find*
- *Halliburton wins big N. Norway drill deal*
- *China near n. sea route deal w/ Russia*
- *Skier/polar bear viral video: real or not?*