



TROND OLSEN / SYSSELMANNEN



ARLID LYSSAND / SYSSELMANNEN

A rescuer from the Svalbard governor's office, left, approaches a six-person group on Conwayjøkulen after the expedition's leader fell into a crevasse on Good Friday. At right, helicopter rescuers reach a 19-person group on Akademikerbreen on Easter Sunday after a storm destroyed many of their tents.

Easter salvations

Rescue of 26 people on three expeditions exposes varying Arctic dangers, need for two helicopters

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Regardless of religion, Easter in Svalbard this year was all about salvation as 26 people on three separate expeditions were rescued after being endangered by different perils.

The incidents, plus the rescue of a youth expedition stranded by weather at the North Pole (see story below), exposed the numerous ways excursions can quickly become life-threatening and the difficulties officials may have reaching stranded groups, although only two people sustained moderate injuries.

The Svalbard rescues included the leader of a six-person group who fell into a glacier crevasse (the second such occurrence within a week), a 19-member group trapped by storms on another glacier and a woman injured in a

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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

two-snowmobile collision near Pyramiden.

In addition, rescuers used a helicopter to retrieve an injured person at Isfjord Radio and a sick person on the research vessel *Lance* during the holiday weekend, according to a statement from the Svalbard governor's office.

"To believe that the governor can rescue people out, regardless of circumstances, is wrong," said Per Andreassen, a police lieu-

tenant for the governor, in an interview with *Svalbardposten*. "There is no guarantee for that. It is the weather that determines that the most."

But the rescues also revealed the importance of the governor obtaining a second large helicopter with a de-icing system, which occurred only a few weeks earlier. Without it,

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Trapped at the top of the world

Storm strands Russian youth expedition at North Pole for two nights with little food or fuel

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

For seven Russian teenagers reaching the North Pole after an exhausting trek that was far longer than planned, the "reward" was world's most extreme and unwelcome slumber party.

"The weather is still keeping us captive," wrote Pavel Astakhov, one of three adults on

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COURTESY OF SHPARO.RU

A group of seven Russian teenagers and three adults skis along the edge of the Arctic ice sheet during their eight-day trek to the North Pole.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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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.

Confirmed sightings of life



Longyearbyen youths (from left) Kasper Fjerdingsøy, Veronica Lindås Ruud, Vårin Sandring Storø, Teodor Dahl Knutsen and Ivar Henningsen perform a song after their civil Confirmation ceremony Saturday at Kulturhuset. At right, Svalbard Church Deacon Torunn Sørensen offers guidance to Marianne Log Nyheim as she prepares to lead 17 peers in a procession before their ecclesiastical Confirmation on April 13. Photos by Mark Sabbatini / Icepeople.



Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

Leave it to a childcare worker to wring the most amusing interpretation of this week's rescue of Russian teenagers from the North Pole as told by the always tricky to translate official blog from the Barneo ice camp. Caleb (no last name at his blog), a guy in his 60s who watches kids with his wife on a farm in the U.S. state of New Hampshire, also has a long running interest in how climate change is affecting the Arctic and thus is keeping up on the happenings this season at the top of the world. He notes "the first hint things were not unfolding entirely smoothly" in the Barneo blog was when **Japanese figure skater Miki Ando wanted a larger skating rink for her performance at the North Pole and, as the awkward Google Translate version of the blog put it, "as a result, the children did not have enough hot water, because of its limited reserves to Borneo."** Caleb's reaction: "Children? What the heck?" As he puzzles out the rest of the rescue he notes "as a childcare provider, at a place that focuses on the outdoors, I occasionally run into situations where parents are extremely anxious about children being outside in cold weather" and "as Americans fret themselves into a tizzy (about whether future generations will see snow due to climate change) the Russians calmly fly 'children' – likely teenagers – up to the Pole by

	Lamb Curry.
<u>COLD:</u>	Soused Herrings.
	Spiced Beef.
<u>POTATOES:</u>	Roast Sirloin of Beef.
Baked.	Roast Shoulder of Mutton.
Boiled.	Galantine of Chicken.
Fried.	Terrine of Black Game.
	Pigeon Pie. Salad.
<u>CHEESES:</u>	Ground Rice Pudding.
Silton.	S.ew.e.l Peaches.
Grnyère	Palace Cake.

SVALBARD MUSEUM

Just an appetizer: To fully gorge on this 108-year-old food check out tinyurl.com/mkxj36.

jet and show them the wonders of that world." His blog at <http://sunriseswanson.wordpress.com> ... Speaking of the lighter side of grim situations, **just about the only non-sobering news out of the governor's office during an Easter holiday filled with emergency rescues was, well, a sobriety checkpoint.** NRK, at the end of an article about the rescues, threw in a "by the way" notice that police conducted checks of 60 people in Grøndalen near Barentsburg and none tested positive for alcohol. "It was very encouraging," Christian Svarstad told the news agency ... Finally, **this month's Very Cool Relic from the Svalbard Museum is a lunch menu from a 1906 Svalbard cruise** that, quite frankly, sounds way better than the rubber lobsters and sinewy steaks modern megaships are serving as formal fare.



A Russian scientist, left, lowers a seawater monitor into an ice hole at the Barneo ice camp. At top right, Norwegian explorer Bengt Rotmo is left isolated at the North Pole after a helicopter picks up a client he guided to the top of the world. At bottom right, two-time world champion figure skater Miki Ando of Japan sets a record for the highest-ever performance April 16 on an improvised rink at the North Pole. All photos courtesy of the Russian Geographical Society Expeditionary Center.

Putin honors teens rescued at Pole

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the expedition, in a Twitter message Sunday. "The only food remaining is half of an Easter cake, and there is even less fuel."

The expedition, the last by a group reaching the North Pole this year from the Barneo ice camp, was forced to camp for two nights at the top of the world overnight after being caught in a blizzard that prevented aircraft from landing. A helicopter from Russian's Federal Security Service finally reached the group Sunday night.

The seven 16-year-olds – including two who are deaf, plus others from special-education schools and orphanages – set out April 10 for what was supposed to be a 110-kilometer ski trip to the North Pole. But a rapidly drifting ice sheet extended the trek over jagged ice fields and ridges to 180 kilometers. They were also skiing constantly into strong winds from the north and abnormally cold temperatures of up to minus 45 Celsius.

Their ultimate success and safe return is receiving high praise in Russia, which regards the North Pole as one of its top strategic priorities, as the youths met Tuesday with President Vladimir Putin, who offered them a role assist-

ing youth projects for the Russian Geographical Society, according to *RIA Novosti*.

A statement from Astakhov's agency is also heavy on triumphalism, noting "the team traversed 180 kilometers to reach the chilly spot in eight days, while expeditions of experienced adult athletes from the U.S. and Norway fell behind."

But at least two of those "others" shared the honor of an extended stay at the top of the world, as Norwegian explorer Bengt Rotmo and a client he was guiding reached the North Pole on Saturday. And while the youths and Rotmo's client are back in civilization warming themselves, Rotmo is continuing on in what's expected to be a six- to eight-week journey to Cape Discovery on Canada's Ellesmere Island.

Also, while the staff at Barneo dismantled the camp for the year Monday, explorers Eric Larsen and Ryan Waters are still trying to reach the North Pole on a trek that started at Ellesmere Island. As of Tuesday, the 38th day of their trip, they were 377 kilometers from the Pole, but have only 15 days of supplies remaining and are facing poor conditions.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM **SVALBARDPOSTEN** VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Roberts denied permission to use helicopters for new film

Several organizations are joining film producer Jason Roberts to protest a decision denying him permission to land twice by helicopter on Kvitøya to film a modern retelling of Swedish engineer Salomon August Andrée's tragic 1897 balloon journey. Guri Tveito, head of the Department for Environment Protection for Svalbard's governor, said the project doesn't merit a special exemption from the Svalbard Environmental Protection Act because filming isn't a rare activity where an exemption is necessary to conduct it. She also noted Roberts has violated regulations previously, most notably with the BBC documentary "Frozen Planet." Roberts, in an objection to Norway's environmental ministry, claims the decision contradicts political signals welcoming international film productions. It also states the project would cause no environmental damage and occur when there is little wildlife in the area. Svalbard Tourism and the Svalbard Museum are among the entities supporting Roberts

Reindeer snagged in extra set of antlers won't get help

A reindeer who's acquired an unwanted extra set of antlers attached to a rope he's snagged in won't be getting any help freeing itself from the Svalbard governor's office. The animal has been spotted numerous times by officials and trekkers in recent weeks, all reporting the antlers are hanging loosely to the right side of his head, but it is not preventing him from foraging. "The rope doesn't go around the neck of the animal and it is not suffering," said Eigil Movik, the governor's senior advisor for nature management. "It is not an ideal situation, but in the spring it will shed its antlers anyway, so it all falls off."

Lack of ice keeps bears at Hopen for first time in winter

Several walrus and polar bears were observed on land for the first time during winter by researchers at the Hopen Meteorological Station. The bears were trapped on the island due to the lack of sea ice, which has been shrinking for the past decade, said Kåre Holter Solhjell, the station's manager.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly cloudy. SE winds to 18 km/h. High -8C (-13C wind chill), low -10C (-15C wind chill).	Mostly clear. SE winds to 18 km/h. High -9C (-14C wind chill), low -12C (-16C wind chill).	Snow. E winds to 25 km/h. High -8C (-13C wind chill), low -11C (-16C wind chill).	Clear. NE winds to 15 km/h. High -10C (-14C wind chill), low -12C (-17C wind chill).
24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight

Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -10C (-15C), -11C (-16C), light 24:00h; Monday, p. cloudy, -8C (-16C), -10C (-17C), light 24:00h; Tuesday, cloudy, -6C (-14C), -8C (-16C), light 24:00h; Wednesday, cloudy, -6C (-13C), -8C (-16C), light 24:00h

Data provided by storm.no



ARLID LYSSAND / SYSSELMANNEN

A rescue helicopter prepares to depart from Ebbabreen, north of Pyramiden, with a woman injured in a two-snowmobile accident during a heavy snowstorm Sunday. The helicopter is one of two identical aircraft now in use by the Svalbard governor's office, with the second arriving and being put into service only a few weeks ago. Officials said multiple rescues during the Easter holiday demonstrates the need for two such helicopters, since the previous second rescue aircraft had a lower passenger capacity, shorter flight range and couldn't fly in conditions where icing might occur.

Weather forces flurry of rescues

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Andreassen said, rescuers would have been forced to leave some members in the 19-person group behind and the weather might have deteriorated before a second flight could be made.

The Good Friday incident occurred early in the afternoon when the six-person group, led by Belgian guide Brent D'Hooge, was returning from a ski trip to Newtonoppen. He told *Svalbardposten* he was leading the group across Jacksonfjellet in a "total whiteout" when the surface beneath him collapsed.

"The dog went first of all and it apparently went over a snow bridge," he said. "For suddenly I saw only a 'swoosh,' and then I hung in an abyss and screamed in panic."

The group was traveling in two roped teams due to the conditions and those attached to D'Hooge immediately fell to the ground and crossed their skis to stop his fall after about six meters. Once the other team reached the crevasse, D'Hooge and the dog were lowered to a stable snow bridge.

D'Hooge, who dislocated his shoulder in the fall, said he didn't notice the injury until he tried to climb out, at which point he decided officials should be signaled for help. But he had trouble reaching the emergency locator transmitter on his sled and told *Svalbardposten* it was a mistake for the lead sled to be carrying it.

The governor's office received the beacon's signal at about 1:50 p.m. and immediately sent a rescue helicopter to the site, but it was unable to land due to the weather, according to a prepared statement. Officials then advised the expeditioners "to set up the tent, stay at the site and keep warm" while the Longyearbyen Red Cross was contacted to organize a rescue group on skis.

"It is an area with fairly high risk of falling into crevasses, therefore we can not go in with snowmobiles, said Tore Hongset, an official with the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre

Northern Norway, in an interview with NRK.

Those at the crevasse were able to pull D'Hooge and the dog out using ropes, but were then forced to wait for three hours before the weather cleared enough for a helicopter to land. D'Hooge was treated at Longyearbyen Hospital and has since returned to his hometown in Belgian, but he told *Svalbardposten* he plans to continue offering tours in Svalbard and elsewhere in the Arctic.

The rescue of 19 people on Akademikerbreen on Easter Sunday proved easier despite inclement weather. Brynjulv Eide, one of three guides in the group, said they contacted the governor's office at about 11:30 a.m. when winds reaching speeds of up to 27 meters per second began destroying tents and blowing away equipment.

"It is well with us, but we are at the limit of what is safe," Eide said he told rescuers.

Andreassen told the news agency a rescue using snowmobiles – which would have taken much longer – was being organized in case the weather prevented the helicopters from landing, but it proved unnecessary.

"When the helicopters arrived the weather was decent, so they took the chance to land one at a time and bring out the skiers," he said. "The camp and equipment are still there; we have to prioritize health and life."

Nobody in the expedition was injured or required other medical care, according to the governor's office.

Also rescued by helicopter during Easter was a woman who sustained arm and shoulder injuries after the snowmobile collision in low-visibility conditions near Pyramiden.

"The accident probably happened when the track on one scooter was destroyed and the snowmobile suddenly stopped," causing the driver close behind to collide, Andreassen told NRK.

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

What's up

April 23

6 p.m.: Kick-off for Svalbard Skimarathon. Kulturhuset.

April 26

Open day at Longyearbyen Youth Club.

April 27

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

5 p.m.: Movie: "The Amazing Spider-Man 2" (3D), U.S. action/adventure, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "The Lunchbox," French/Indian/German/U.S. comedy/romance, all ages. Kulturhuset.

April 28

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

April 29

12:30 p.m.: Reopening of Museumsveien bridge, featuring speeches, songs and African dance performers.

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

May 3

10 a.m.: Svalbard Skimarathon. Timed full-length race begins at 10 a.m. Recreational full- and half-length races begin at 11 a.m. Begins at Mine 6. Full details and registration at <http://svalbardturn.no>.

May 4

5 p.m.: Movie: "Ta Meg Med," Norwegian musical, all ages. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "Venus In Fur," French drama, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

May 5

8 p.m.: Trivia Quiz. Barentz Pub.

May 6

1 p.m.: Administration Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtonoppen room.

2 p.m.: Technical Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtonoppen room.

3 p.m.: Youth Development and Culture Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtonoppen room.

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:

- *Climate change making Everest riskier*
- *Study: Antarctica once hot as California*
- *U.S.: 'Climate change war' no metaphor*
- *'Ice Road Truckers' star kidnaps hooker*