



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Some of the youngest racers at the Children's Skifestival, left, dash out of the starting line – with a lot of prodding from parents – Sunday on the moraine above Nybyen. At right, an idle race gets some exposure to an abundance of new snow.

May it snow (and snow)

Racers at 20th ski marathon, snowfall and cold all reach peaks

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

There may have been a record 599 racers in the 20th annual Svalbard Skimarathon, but Ragnheid Skogseth knew who was number one well before the race started.

"I feel the pressure," said Skogseth, 38,

after receiving a race bib with the cherished number. The oceanography researcher at The University Centre in Svalbard didn't actually win the race, but with a load of chocolate, cookies and lemonade in her mandatory "emergency" pack, a trophy apparently wasn't

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A record 599 racers line up Saturday at Fritham for the start of the 20th Svalbard Skimarathon.

Flu hits big at station

One-third of Ny-Ålesund sick with 'ordinary' strain; officials say worst appears to be past

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

A flu outbreak has infected at least one-third of Ny-Ålesund's estimated 60 residents, although officials say it does not appear to be a serious strain and new cases appear to be declining.

"Most of the people are well now or are recovering," said Knut Erik Hanssen, office manager for Kings Bay, which oversees operations at the station where multiple nations conduct research.

No official restrictions are being imposed and activity at the station has not been significantly affected, he said. But the size of the epidemic – which has largely spared Longyearbyen and other Svalbard communities – is surprising.

"No one I ever talked to has been has been through anything like this," Hanssen said.

Flu and other infectious diseases are a serious concern in Svalbard due to the close proximity of residents and isolation from outside assistance. An outbreak of "swine" flu in 2009 resulted in vaccinations for most of Longyearbyen's residents being obtained, for instance.

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What, me worry? Not cruisers

Britain's 'avoid the Arctic' safety alert isn't scaring off Svalbard visitors, tour companies say

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Visitors generally aren't advised to blow off warnings about the potential dangers in Svalbard, but tour companies aren't exactly dismayed nobody seems to be heeding Britain's warning not to take cruises here.

"There has been no impact at all and no

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ARCTIC NATURE GUIDE

Participants practice glacier crevasse training in Svalbard's Arctic Nature Guide program, which Hurtigruten's participation in is being promoted by the Norwegian ferry line this week.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

Editor

Mark Sabbatini

Staff writer/photographer

Karla Paz

Copy editor

Kristan Hutchison

Psychiatrist

Irene Gallion

Mailing address

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

Telephone

Norway: +47 41 51 46 38
U.S. +1 (970) 673-4472

E-mail

marksabbatini@yahoo.com

Web site

www.icepeople.net

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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.

Occupy Svalbard: Redistribution of snow begins



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Longyearbyen residents and visiting Norwegian dignitaries, including Labor Party Vice Chairperson Helga Pedersen, reach the end of a May 1 parade march from Svalbard Church to the town center. While some May Day events elsewhere, primarily the United States, featured protesters trying to shut down businesses and frequently getting arrested instead, most commerce in Longyearbyen actually stopped – by choice since it was a national holiday. Pedersen, one of numerous Labor officials visiting communities for the occasion, delivered the keynote presentation during an evening event at Kulturhuset featuring a variety of local performers.

Ny-Ålesund flu epidemic waning

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An unusually high rate of flu cases in Ny-Ålesund was noticed by residents last Wednesday, said Kari Schrøder Hansen, a general consultant surgeon at Longyearbyen Hospital. The station does not have a medical staff, so she flew to the community Monday to provide medicine and take blood samples for analysis.

"We think it's just an ordinary flu, nothing else," she said, although the precise strain isn't yet known.

Administering vaccines is not being con-

sidered because "for this season it's too late," Hansen said.

Station officials took extra steps to ensure residents practiced preventative measures such as washing their hands before situations where infections might, but are generally relying on common sense, Hansen said.

"People who are sick are staying home and we're coming to them with food if they need it," he said.

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

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

One of the things we love about Svalbard is while real helicopters – along with rifle-toting polar bear guards – may be necessary to protect children having fun outdoors, there's a remarkable absence of "helicopter parents" all but insisting their precious offspring live in a bubble protected for all possible dangers of society. We got another reminder of it listening to the loud profanity-tinged hip hop being played by a DJ at Sunday's Children's Skifestival. Not to mention tots playing unsupervised near open fire pits and such ... "crowdsourcing is one of those internet-driven words we're all adding to our vocabulary, but it may not be working out as well as hoped for Wes Milholen, an architect trying to raise enough funds on Kickstarter for travel here that will allow him to write the first book in a series about the area's structures. As of this week 22 backers have contributed \$4,515, well short of the \$7,500 he says he

needs by 10:46 p.m. May 15 (especially since the rate of donations seems to be slowing). Details are at <http://archinect.com/news/article/44216954/arctic-architecture-svalbard> ... We've written a lot about Russia plundering "our" precious Arctic resources as part of the New Cold War, but this has to be our all-time favorite: "Russians 'invade' Norway for Pampers." That headline in Barents Observer tops an article that notes Russian shoppers from Murmansk are emptying store shelves in the adjacent border town of Kirkenes, forcing some stores to impose quotas. The disposable diapers cost about 15 rubles in Murmansk compared to five in Kirkenes, so "it is good business for Russians to fill their cars and resale the Pampers home in Murmansk," the newspaper notes. But the Norwegians aren't blameless victims, since stores were using cheap diapers as a "carrot" to attract shoppers with families, which resulted in a price war.



GETTY IMAGES

Rescuers approach the Costa Concordia after it veered off course and crashed near the island of Giglio in January. The accident is the most high-profile of several recent incidents raising concerns about cruising safety, with British officials stating such problems are magnified in the Arctic.

Cruise alert not scaring off tourists

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queries," wrote Madeleine Roast, a spokesperson for Hurtigruten's United Kingdom office, in an e-mail interview. The Norwegian ferry line accounts for a large percentage of the 100,000 Britons expected take cruises to the Norwegian Arctic this year.

"I've had no phone calls, no e-mails and I've heard nothing from our people at Innovation Norway," a British agency which coordinates with Svalbard Tourism, said Kjersti Norås, coordinator for the latter agency.

Other cruise operators and analysts expressed more anger than alarm about the warning issued last week by Britain's Foreign Office. The alert stated search-and-rescue capabilities are often insufficient due to the extreme conditions and remoteness from modern medical facilities, which both industry and Norwegian government officials disputed strongly.

"The biggest risk is running out of money in a place where nothing less than a mortgage is required to purchase even the most modest of sandwiches washed down with a small glass of lager," wrote John Honeywell, a cruise analyst for London's *Mirror*, in an article head-

lined "Troll tales from the Foreign Office."

But Britain's warning isn't necessarily going unheeded by the industry. A news release posted at Hurtigruten's U.K. website days after the alert emphasizes the training some guides receive in the Arctic Nature Guide program, a one-year classroom and field course that is a joint project by Tourism Svalbard, The University Centre in Svalbard and Finnmark University College.

The alert also doesn't appear to be affecting those recommending destinations for British travelers. Jane Archer, cruise correspondent for *The Telegraph* of London, listed Svalbard second on a list this week of the world's top 10 adventure cruise locations.

There's also the usual articles about some of the unique perils of Svalbard, such as the rifle-clad volunteers keeping a lookout for polar bears during the Svalbard Skimarathon and Children's Skifestival this past weekend. But Norås said that should be cause for reassurance, not concern.

"Then it's not a danger," she said.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM **SVALBARDPOSTEN** VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Cutting off alcohol sales at midnight goes before council

Cutting off sales of alcohol at midnight instead of 2 a.m. will be considered by Longyearbyen's municipal council during its May 8 meeting. Changing the starting time for sales at pubs and other eateries to noon instead of 11 a.m. is also being proposed. "We have adopted a comprehensive plan that says we are to reduce alcohol consumption," said Kari Schröder Hansen, a member of the committee recommending the change. "Then we must dare to take action. I think we should reduce the serving time. We can also limit the number of licensed premises." A total of 20 applications to sell alcohol are being considered this year. An online *Svalbardposten* poll shows 68 percent of 922 respondents opposing the change.

Svea Nord mining halted due to rocks, wear on equipment

Coal production at Svea Nord came to a halt April 23 due to a high amount of rock and excessive wear on equipment. Per Andersson, administrative director for Store Norske, said the rocks have resulted in very slow production for the past three months, with a decline this year of 100,000 tons costing the company 75 million kroner. "We got to a point where there was no alternative but to cease production," he said. "The wear on the equipment was simply too big." He said the down time will not affect sales because several hundred thousand tons of untreated coal are in the warehouse at Kapp Amsterdam, and the down time will be spent on cleaning that coal and equipment maintenance.

China, setting aside tensions, ready to built EISCAT dish

Prospects for a third antenna at the EISCAT facility are brightening after a long period of darkness due to strained relations with China. A delegation from the China Institute of Radio Wave Propagation completed an analysis of development necessary for the project during a visit last week. Officials said they hope to begin work next spring. The tension resulted from Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Snow. W winds to 18 km/h. High -4C (-10C wind chill), low -6C (-13C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. S to 18 km/h. High -2C (-2C wind chill), low -6C (-10C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. E winds to 11 km/h. High -5C (-8C wind chill), low -6C (-10C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. Variable winds to 17 km/h. High -5C (-5C wind chill), low -8C (-11C wind chill).
24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight
Extended forecast: Sunday, p. cloudy, -6C (-8C), -7C (-10C), light 24:00h; Monday, cloudy, -5C (-7C), -8C (-11C), light 24:00h; Tuesday, p. cloudy, -4C (-8C), -6C (-8C), light 24:00h; Wednesday, p. cloudy, -4C (-8C), -6C (-10C), light 24:00h			
Data provided by yr.no			



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A lone skier, above, makes the long trek to the starting line for Sunday's Children's Skifestival, which also featured sledding, a barbecue and other activities. At left, younger racers ski along a short loop course while older youths compete on a far longer and more challenging course around the perimeter.

It may be May, but it looks like winter

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part of that pressure.

"Of course I also want something to sit on because I'm taking a lunch," she said.

The start of the race was delayed for a hour due to low visibility, and stormy weather and difficult course conditions further slowed participants. Kjetil Watne won the race with a time of two hours, 27 minutes and 45 seconds – nearly 28 minutes slower than the record – while Berthe Annette Svenkerud was the top women's finisher with a time of 2:39:31.

Waiting longer to catch buses from Longyearbyen to the race at Fritham and other hitches didn't seem to bother most racers, who also said the event hasn't gotten too large.

"The races are getting better," said Tom Breivik, 42, a project leader for Store Norske competing in his fifth straight race. "They're getting more organized."

About 80 local volunteers assisted with passing out refreshments, watching for polar

bears and other duties. The high number, many signing up after officials imposed 500-racer limit, allowed everyone registering to enter.

There were full- and half-marathon categories for the 42-kilometer course, but most of the participants from ten countries were more interested in personal records or just having fun than trophies.

"My only goal is to enjoy the weather," said Mette Bjerregaard, a Copenhagen resident in that wide "don't ask" age range between teenager and senior citizen. "I think this seems to be nice. It would be nice if the sun came out to take pictures."

But the "poor" weather is proving a blessing for snow lovers who endured a miserably warm winter in Longyearbyen. April was by far the coldest month so far this year and snowfall in recent days has been the most seen in 2012.

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



I am a hard-working Dutch woman looking for a job in Svalbard, Tromsø or the northern part of Norway. I speak English, Dutch, German, Spanish, Hungarian and Slovenian. I am a certified piano teacher, but I am open for other jobs to as long as I am paid. For further info e-mail rebekakonc@hotmail.com.

What's up

May 2

6 p.m.: Movie filmed in Svalbard: "En Fiende å Dø For," Swedish drama premiering this year, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset. Film details and reviews at www.filmweb.no/film/article418290.ece.

May 3

6 p.m.: Bydrift Board meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newntoppen room.

May 6

8 p.m.: Movie: "American Pie: Reunion," U.S. comedy/romance, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

May 8

7 p.m.: Municipal Council meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newntoppen room. Agenda at lokalstyre.custompublish.com/lokalstyret.252888.no.html.

May 10

Deadline for tour minibus applications in advance of summer season.

2 p.m.: Board of Culture and Leisure meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newntoppen room.

May 13

6 p.m.: Movie: "Pirates" (3D), British/U.S. animated/family film dubbed in Norwegian, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Varg Veum – Kalde Hjerter," Danish/Norwegian crime/thriller, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

May 19

11 a.m.: Cultural exchange to Barentsburg.

June 2

10 a.m.: Spitsbergen Marathon. Registration and other details at svalbardturn.no.

6 p.m.: Cultural exchange from Barentsburg. Kulturhuset.

June 3

6 p.m.: Movie: "Laban - Lille Annas Favoritter," Swedish children's film dubbed in Norwegian, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

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:

- *Polar bears, short on food, swim long*
- *Climate skeptics: Clouds will save us*
- *Greenpeace boards Swedish icebreaker*
- *Arctic Christians get first full Inuit Bible*