



Daze of our lies

Confusion the winner so far in a likely marathon competition to purchase Austre Adventfjord

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

The owners say they've never heard about some Chinese tycoon offering to buy their land. The tycoon says he's offering nowhere near the amount reported by the media. The media is making noises about a government cover-up. The bureaucrats are basically saying they have no idea what the hell is going on.

Stayed tuned until next week's episode, when much of what's being reported may again be wrong. Or read on to experience the developing drama of bewildering legalities and maneuvers known as the Austre Adventfjord land sale.

The sale of the 217-square-kilometer coal-rich land across from Longyearbyen appears to making little official progress as a Bergen-based family that owns the property say they have received no offers so far.

But Chinese real estate tycoon Huang Nubo, who last week was widely quoted as saying he would offer a bid of 656 million kroner, earned another deluge of global headlines this week after telling NRK he wants to buy

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JON AARS / NORWEGIAN POLAR INSTITUTE

Jon Aars, a Norwegian Polar Institute researcher, attaches a satellite collar to a Svalbard polar bear during a month-long field expedition to track the animals' movements, growth and population.

No child, will travel

A season with surprisingly few polar bear cubs and low ice sees a female cross six time zones

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

It was a season of remarkable activity and inactivity for Svalbard's female polar bears, as one traveled across an unprecedented six time zones and others were even more inactive than usual in hibernation due to a lack of newborns.

Researchers returning from a month-long expedition last week captured 73 bears, taking measurements such as their weight and age,

and fitting them with satellite transmitters so data such as their location and temperature can be tracked over time. Jon Aars, a researcher with the Norwegian Polar Institute, told *Svalbardposten* the most amazing story from the past year's data monitoring appears to be the bear that made an unprecedented 3,100-kilometer journey to Russia's Severnaya Zemlya.

"We followed it closely because it was so strange," Aars told the newspaper. "I thought it was going to Franz Josef Land, but it was a bit poor with the ice there, so I think it changed his mind. So we thought it was going to Novaya Zemlya, but as it approached it

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It's sort of our 200th birthday

Svalbard not a part of Norway in 1814, but seen as worthy part of bicentennial Constitution Day

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

Norway's celebrating the 200th anniversary of its constitution Saturday. But since Svalbard didn't become part of Norway until more than a century later, does it really deserve to share in the blowing out of the candles at the party?

Absolutely, according to historians and longtime Longyearbyen residents who say the

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Karsten Alnæs explains Norway's constitutional history Saturday at Longyearbyen Library.

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.

Shilling for the gub'mint and 'real' local paper



STIG ONARHEIM / SYSSELMANNEN

A go-when-you want flight to Ny-Ålesund costs about 40,000 kroner, but desktop tourists can take a free virtual trip on the governor's rescue helicopter by pilot Stig Onarheim, courtesy of a helmet camera provided by The Local Paper of Record Page Views. The video is at tinyurl.com/qfgepek.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

Our grasp on reality hasn't suddenly turned upside-down (insert obvious punchline here), but something we wrote last week is motivating us to take a rare detour to the other end of the world for this week's Big Scary Climate News. The dam in Antarctica has broke, so to speak, and the melting of the ice sheet means sea level will shortly be rising by 12 feet. "Shortly" is relative, of course, meaning the blink of an eye geologically speaking, but a "whadda I care, I'll be dead then" 200 years in human time. Still, the news has resulted in some fun Photoshopping showing what cities like New York and London will look like when it happens, so we thought we'd offer what's basically a **five-year-old's drawing showing what will soon be submerged in Longyearbyen**. People inside the Radisson and Svalbardbutikken might be inclined to give a sigh of relief, but keep in mind this doesn't include the sudden geometric acceleration of Svalbard's Austfonna ice cap we mentioned this week, or other mass meltdowns occurring in Greenland and other Arctic regions. Climate change skeptics, naturally, are responding by beating up scientists on internet, making us kinda wish we could see just how high the water needs to rise



LONGYEARBYEN LOKALSTYRE

This is totally a crude SWAG: But since climate skeptics will give it the same weight as real science, here's who will soon be underwater due to the Antarctic ice dam break. Of course, reality will be a wee bit worse since there's a few chunks of ice melting in the north as well.

around those byte bullies before they acknowledge they're wet ... Meanwhile, **in modern-day cyberbullying, students at Longyearbyen School got another dose of "just say no"** this week, courtesy of the organization Bruk Hue. All well and good since officials with the school and Svalbard governor's office saying local online bullying occurs, even if students say it's rare since the town's constantly changing population means knowing and quickly accepting people from a wide variety of backgrounds. But a couple things about Bruk Hue's PR after the event seem to have gone astray. First, those "enthusiastic" kids in the handout photo don't look much more engaged than the ones in Ferris Bueller (pause while everybody under 40 does the Google thing). That might have something to do with the fact they just spent a bunch of time rehearsing and performing an anti-bullying play in January. Second, the other photo in the press release, a seemingly innocent shot of the presenter at the famous polar bear warning road sign, has bizarre implications if one thinks of the polar bear as nature's ultimate bully.



BARNEVAKTEN

"Enthusiastic students:" We're not knocking the cause, but the perception doesn't bode well for someone lecturing kids about awareness.



COURTESY OF DÅREKISTEN TEATER

The Dårækisten Teater, seen here performing its new children's play "Hurra for Grunnloven!" ("Hurra for the Constitution!"), will bring the bicentennial celebration show to Longyearbyen on Nov. 22.

Svalbard's OK crashing the party late

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country's two centuries of progress are fully felt in the archipelago.

"Of course it has something to do with us living in a democracy here," said Anne Lise Sandvik, who will be one of the presenters during a traditional evening holiday gala at Kulturhuset. "All of the good things in of Norway have come up with us."

Svalbard was virtually uninhabited in 1814, especially since Russian and Norwegian whalers and hunters abandoned the area in the years following British raids in the Barents Sea in 1809.

Karsten Alnæs, 76, a historian and author who gave a presentation about Norway's constitutional history last Saturday at Longyearbyen Library, said Svalbard's situation is somewhat similar to that of Finnmark's. Occupants there didn't learn about the constitution until months later and didn't have representatives participate in the government until years later.

"I assume that Norwegians had to be on Svalbard at the time and were probably thrilled that Norway had its own constitution," Alnæs said.

This year's local Syttende Mai celebration features several special additions, including a presentation during the gala by Russian Consulate General in Barentsburg Jurij Gribkov and local musicians performing the newly composed anniversary song "Det Går et Festog Gjennom Landet," selected as the winner of a contest hosted by the President of Parliament.

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

Syttende Mai schedule

- 7 a.m.: Firing of the salute.
- 8 a.m.: Procession w/ the Longyearbyen Storband beginning at Svalbard Church. Stops include raising of the flag and laying of flowers at the July 22 memorial by Headmaser Anne Søvold Vikanes; laying of wreath at memorial at Huset by Spitsbergen Travel Director Sven-Erik Svendsen; and laying of wreath at the miner's monument by Longyearbyen Hospital Office Director Ottar Svensen.
- 10 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Kirke.
- 11 a.m.: Traditional train procession through Longyearbyen, ending at the Skjæringa memorial.
- 11:45 a.m.: Syttende Mai presentations, songs and commemorations, including laying of wreath at Skjæringa memorial by Longyearbyen Mayor Christin Kristoffersen; laying of flowers at the memorial by Russian Consulate General of Barentsburg Jurij Gribkov; firing of salute.
- 12:10 p.m.: Bus departs from Svalbardhallen.
- 12:15 p.m.: Family activities and food at Svalbardhallen.
- 4 p.m.: Exhibit opening: "Moving" by painting/pastels artist Runi Langum. Music performance by Vilde Murkussen Klausen. Galleri Svalbard.
- 7 p.m.: Syttende Mai gala performance, featuring presentations by Gov. Odd Olsen Ingerø and Russian Consulate General in Barentsburg Jurij Gribkov. Awarding of Tyfus Statuette (recognizing a resident whose work has "kept us out of typhus") and Youth Cultural Stipend (recognizing a local youth's significant work and talent) by Anne Lise Sandvik and Kristin Furu Grotting.
- 7 p.m.: Youth club open for juniors until 8:30 p.m.
- 9 p.m.: Youth club open for seniors until 11 p.m.

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

City's new long-term strategic plan sees up to 700 new jobs

A new long-term strategic business plan for Longyearbyen that envisions a larger population working the equivalent of 220 to 700 new full-time jobs was approved by the Municipal Council on Tuesday. The plan projects growth in all industries except mining, manufacturing and construction, which are projected to match the today's 643 full-time-equivalent positions. The most optimistic scenario predicts public sector FTEs will rise to 649 compared to 343 today, trade and services to 469 from 319, travel and culture to 330 from 230, and transportation, logistics and infrastructure to 152 from 102. Mayor Christin Kristoffersen declined to discuss if Longyearbyen's population growth could hit a critical mass, saying leaders will use the plan for "ensuring the stabilization of society. If you do not work for development it is by definition stagnation."

Two men fighting for trapping site, but governor may win

Two people waging a court battle to determine who owns a trapping station at Farmhamna may both find themselves losing out due to regulations that may result in Svalbard's governor getting the property instead. Hans Lund, who entered into an agreement with the governor to build the station in the early 1990s, remained there with his wife until moving away for a few seasons during the mid 1990s due to the birth of a child. Henningsen contends he has a contract for his takeover of the station in September of 1996. Lund denies signing any such agreement. The court case is scheduled to be heard in June, but the governor may ultimately prevail due to a clause stating any future sale or rental of the property requires his office's approval as well as that of the current owner, and the governor was not contacted.

Mall upgrade plans delayed

Development upgrades to Lompensenteret under new owner Amfi AS will begin later than expected, as architects will likely begin an assessment in June instead of April as originally announced. Marit Kristine Melby, representing the mall's 15 tenants, said she has heard "much speculation" about possible upgrades, but declined to provide specifics.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly cloudy. Variable winds to 15 km/h. High -7C (-12C wind chill), low -12C (-16C wind chill).	Mostly clear. SE winds to 15 km/h. High -3C (-7C wind chill), low -11C (-15C wind chill).	Cloudy. S winds to 35 km/h. High 2C (-3C wind chill), low -3C (-8C wind chill).	Cloudy. W winds to 42 km/h. High 1C (-4C wind chill), low -3C (-9C wind chill).
24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight

Extended forecast: Sunday, p. cloudy, -1C (-6C), -2C (-7C), light 24:00h; Monday, snow, 0C (-3C), -2C (-8C), light 24:00h; Tuesday, snow, 0C (-4C), -2C (-7C), light 24:00h; Wednesday, cloudy, 0C (-4C), -2C (-6C), light 24:00h

Data provided by storm.no



BRUTUS OSTLING / WWF



BRUTUS OSTLING / WWF



JON AARS / NORWEGIAN POLAR INSTITUTE

A Norwegian Polar Institute researcher, top left, embeds a geo-location tag in the ear of a polar bear, allowing scientists to track data such as location and temperature. At right, an anesthetized polar bear is weighed by researchers who will also keep track of the animal's overall size. At bottom left, a WWF scientist enters data on a laptop on the deck of the *Lance* research vessel.

Strange season for bears, researchers

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turned it and went northeast. So I thought it would go on to an island called Ensomheten, not far away, but it again decided against it and went north. It also took a long time before it went on land."

The bear – a 13-year-old, 217-kilogram female nicknamed Kara – eventually returned to Franz Josef Land, where Aars said he believes she is in hibernation and may have cubs.

If so, she will be among the relative few as researchers caught only three bears with a total of four cubs less than a year old during this year's expedition, according to NRK. Normally about one-third of females have newborn cubs.

"It is difficult to conclude that our findings reflect what is happening in the population," Aars told NRK. "It may have been a bad year, or it could be that females with cubs

stayed elsewhere or are still in hibernation."

Researchers had difficulties in the field this year due to thin ice from a winter with prolonged winter heat, which prevented scientists from working on the surface even if it was thick enough to support the bears.

"I probably have not seen such poor spring ice conditions in the 12 winters I have been working on Svalbard," Aars told NRK.

One advantage the researchers had this year is upgraded satellite transmitters, in use since last year, capable of sending data such as GPS coordinates hourly instead of once a year.

Among the participants in this year's expedition were scientists from the WWF nature conservation organization. Their field blog detailing the trip at is tinyurl.com/lmptygg.

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

Tycoon wanting land surprised it's so icy

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the property for "more than" 24 million kroner. Also, while previous reports stated he wants to develop the land as a resort, his comments to NRK were vague and showed a lack of awareness about Svalbard in general.

"I didn't know there was so much ice there," he told the news agency.

Concern about a Chinese entity gaining a foothold in Svalbard has been expressed by international observers due to the country's aggressive push to expand its presence in the resource-rich Arctic. Svalbard Gov. Odd Olsen Ingerø told *Svalbardposten* this week he strongly believes the Norwegian government should purchase the property "to ensure that we can utilize the area in an expedient way."

But *Verdens Gang*, which first reported the planned sale last month and has aggressively followed up since, is claiming Norway's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries

dragged its heels after being alerted about the situation in January. It took a month for the ministry to request a meeting with the owners and when it took place in April officials were poorly prepared. The newspaper also claims the ministry hid e-mails regarding the sale.

Minister Monica Mæland refused to characterize the April meeting and declined concealing correspondence, but acknowledged the ministry's record keeping could have been better, according to *VG*.

The problems for the ministry and other government officials may not be ineptness as much as being overwhelmed during the early stages of what will likely be a complex and prolonged ordeal. Among the numerous initial issues to be resolved is if a 1938 "mischief" clause requiring the ministry's approval if the property is sold to a foreign entity is valid.

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

What's up

May 14

6 p.m.: Movie: "Pompeii," U.S. action/drama, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

May 15

7 p.m.: Book debut/presentation: "Uten Nåde" ("Without Mercy") by author/journalist Birger Amundsen, focusing on a polar bear attacks and hunting in Svalbard. Svalbard Museum.

May 17

200th anniversary celebration of Norwegian Constitution Day. See schedule on page 3.

May 18

5 p.m.: Movie: "Ta meg med," Norwegian musical, all ages. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "Godzilla" (3D), U.S. action/sci-fi, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

May 19

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

May 20

7 p.m.: Exhibit of photos from Africa and tips for photographers, hosted by the Longyearbyen Photo Club. Galleri Svalbard.

7 p.m.: Organ recital and candle lighting. Svalbard Church.

May 21

6 p.m.: Movie: "Godzilla," U.S. action/sci-fi, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

May 24

Cultural exchange show in Barentsburg.

May 25

5 p.m.: Movie: "Bamse og Tyvenes By," Swedish children's film, all ages. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "X-Men: Days of Future Past" (3D), U.S. action/fantasy, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

May 27

1 p.m.: Administration Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen 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:

- *ExxonMobil faces strike in Norway*
- *Russia gets 1st part of vast Arctic claim*
- *Warming turning veggies into junk food*
- *North Korea a player in Arctic shipping?*