



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Per Nilssen, administrative director of Store Norske, lays a wreath at the Skjæringa memorial Friday in honor of those who were killed in Svalbard during World War II as part of Longyearbyen's celebration of Norwegian Constitution Day.

Constitutional ices

Blizzard nips Syttende Mai; Roger Ødegård wins Tyfus statuette

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

If you had a good time on Syttende Mai he probably deserves the credit. If not... blame Mother Nature.

Roger Zahl Ødegård, 55, culminated

Longyearbyen's celebration of Norwegian Constitution Day by winning the 40th annual Tyfus statuette, presented to the person whose activities "help keep us out of Tyfus." Responsible for planning many of the day's

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STONE SUND / LONGYERBYEN LOKALSTYRE

Ida Sigernes, left, accepts flowers and a lithograph after being declared the winner of this year's Youth Culture Grant by Longyearbyen Mayor Christin Kristoffersen at Kulturhuset on Friday. At right, Roger Ødegård gets a congratulatory hug after winning this year's Tyfus award.



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Flights take big bounce

40 percent increase in air travel – highest in Norway – comes after cruise ship passengers double

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Air traffic at Svalbard Airport increased 40 percent in April compared to a year ago, the largest rise in Norway, but the figure isn't necessarily all that surprising since a second airline is now providing service.

There was an 18 percent increase in passengers at the airport during the first four months of 2013, according to Avinor. That includes a 25 percent increase in March, when discount airline Norwegian Air begin offering flights, as well as April's total. Those two months also represent the peak of Svalbard's expedition season.

Still, with hotel revenue up 30 percent so far this year and a doubling of cruise ship passengers in 2012 – and more expected this year – the tourism industry apparently is strongly in the rebound from a lengthy slump dating back to the global recession in 2008.

The rebound is generally occurring nationwide, as passenger traffic at all national airports increased 15.2 percent in April. Avinor credits the Easter Bunny for some of that.

"A March Easter affected the numbers," an agency statement notes. "Domestic traffic –

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Friends close, enemies closer?

Norway invites China into Arctic Council; new book worries about provoking Russians in Svalbard

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

This week in "As The Arctic World Turns:" Two bitter foes find romance, "friendly" neighbors contemplate more confrontations at gunpoint and everyone still wants to be the new tycoon's Best Friend Forever – but are any of them not in it for the money?

Svalbard is again watching the drama from
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NORWEGIAN POLAR INSTITUTE

Norwegian and Chinese researchers cooperate on a project measuring sea ice in Kongsfjorden by pulling a sledge underneath the surface.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

Editor

Mark Sabbatini

Copy Editor

Brennan Purtzer

Principal of principles

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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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.

The 'real' Chinese battle in the Arctic



DAG ARNE HUSDAL

Skiers race down Larsbreen on Thursday evening during the Chinese Downhill race, an informal contest where participants descend by any non-motorized means. Trond Espen Haug, a frequent top finisher in local races, finished first, reaching a maximum speed of 89.7 km/h, according to Dag Arne Husdal, whose video highlighting the event is at www.youtube.com/watch?v=boPXv84qkSM.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

It's not an end to our long quest for an on-the-record scholarly skeptic of climate change, but a we're-slightly-less-doomed study from The University Centre in Svalbard is getting a big shout-out from the global media. **Basically, it says the record melting of ice in Greenland won't sustain what many scientists call a surprising and alarming rate. "The loss of ice has doubled in the past 10 years, but it's not going to double again," said Faezeh Nick, a UNIS glaciologist and lead author of the study, according to *The New York Times*.** That means the worst-case scenario of sea level rise – two meters or so by 2100 – is less likely. On the other hand, since the existing heat-trapping gas will be there for hundreds of years to come, Greenland will continue to melt indefinitely. Details about the study led by Nick, which was based on a new and sophisticated computer model, is at <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v497/n7448/full/nature12068.html>. The *Times* article notes a similar slowdown is projected in a study presented to the Yale Climate Media Forum. There were 265 reader comments after the *Times* article as of our deadline but, lest you be tempted to read them, the top "editors' pick" begins with an all-caps "OH, WHERE ARE THE BABY FRAMS OF THE DEEP?" rant and gets less sensical from there. Also, perhaps it's worth mentioning the top hits for "Greenland" in Google News as we write this are "Widespread Greenland Melting A Sign Of Things To Come," "Research shows historically high level of melting at Greenland ice" and "NASA's GROVER brings Sesame Street's Grover for Greenland debut" ... Meanwhile, a "no doubt about that" (his words) climate change scientist also doing work at UNIS got an itty-bitty shout-out, but he'll take it even if it's unlikely to provide the "simple solutions" he says politicians need for the problems he's discovering. **Geir Johnsen, a marine biology professor who's an adjunct at UNIS, is the**



GEIR JOHNSEN / UNIS

To coldly go: Call this another UFO-over-Svalbard conspiracy picture...and Geir Johnsen might get a lot more people paying attention to this jellyfish and other breakthrough marine life research he's doing at UNIS.

first to be featured in a series of podcasts by The Arctic Institute, which interviewed subjects at the Arctic Frontiers conference earlier this year. The focus of his 16-minute podcast is marine life and seabed studies he's conducting in Svalbard using high-tech stuff like robots, which you'd think would be way cool for a general audience. But he says people are more interested in the dramatic images of polar bears, not the early steps in their food chain, when it comes to climate change. The podcast, with links to other shows as they're posted, is at www.thearcticinstitute.org/2013/05/arctic-frontiers-geir-johnsen.html ... Finally, **the governor conducted its annual trash lottery this week, choosing 20 people out of 174 who craved a change to pick up garbage on the north Spitsbergen coast for four days.** The most interesting name is Marianne Aasen, who essentially is in charge of Longyearbyen's garbage and sewage facilities. You'd think she'd want to spend her holidays as far away from trash as possible, to say nothing of picking it up herself without a chance to shower for four days.

Where oil and water life mix



WORLD WILDLIFE FUND

A map generated by a new website depicts marine ecosystems (yellow, green and blue ovals) and oil and gas activity (blue and purple dots) in the Arctic, with Svalbard circled in red. The site, hosted by the World Wildlife Fund at tinyurl.com/pc4zt35, offers zoomable maps where various elements such as ice concentration, industrial activity and various types of ecosystems can be displayed.

Norway gives China big Arctic boost

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the eye of the storm, as other nations loudly proclaim cooperation in conducting scientific research in the archipelago while more mutedly eyeing military operations, cargo shipping and oil drilling in nearby waters.

Perhaps the most remarkable development was Norway leading the effort to grant China observer status on the Arctic Council. Hackers in China are suspected of accessing sensitive information in Norway, including the SvatSat facility in Svalbard, while China has been fuming since dissenter Liu Xiaobo was awarded the Nobel Peace prize in Oslo in 2010.

But Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide, following a council meeting in Tromsø last week where China was admitted after a decade of trying, hailed the move in a Twitter message as "a major breakthrough."

He has previously stated "we want people to join our club. That means they will not start another club."

Worries another conflicting relationship may worsen are being voiced in a new book by two Norwegian military experts, who argue Norway may provoke Russia by lowering the threshold for using the military in crisis situations. The authors of "Between War and Peace" refer to armed confrontations during the past several years by the Norwegian Coast Guard against Russia trawlers illegally operating in Svalbard's waters – which raised furious protests in Russia – and declare "there is hardly reason to intervene with force if the opponent's reaction leads to a situation that is worse than before the crisis occurred."

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

Easter Bunny helps air traffic increase

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which is particularly affected by holidays and vacations (when there is less travel activity) – increased by almost 19 percent in April, while international traffic increased by over eight percent compared with April last year. But in 2012, Easter fell in April."

Norwegian Air, which twice before abandoned flights to Longyearbyen after a short stint, has already announced intentions to expand the seasonal flights originally planned between Oslo and Longyearbyen to year-round.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Longyearbyen ends 2012 with 17.6M kr. budget surplus

Longyearbyen has a 17.6 million kroner surplus from its 2012 budget, but that won't stop local officials from requesting more than twice as much national funding for 2014 to pay for major projects. Lower pension costs, higher interest income and unfilled jobs are the primary reasons for the surplus, according to reports submitted to the municipal council. Bydrift, the municipal infrastructure agency, fared best with an estimated 10 million kroner surplus due to lower operating expenses, higher than expected revenue and better interest rates on deposits. The agency's special projects fund nearly doubled to 60 million kroner due to state funding for a wastewater treatment plant and sales of several properties. The city is seeking 303 million kroner from the state in 2014, 145 million of which is for upgrades at the city's electricity plant.

Fix sought for law requiring vet exam for dogs on flights

A new law this month requiring dogs to be examined by a veterinarian before being transported to the mainland is frustrating Longyearbyen dog owners because there is no full-time vet. Officials with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food said they plan to meet with Svalbard officials to discuss possible solutions, including isolating dogs after they arrive on the mainland or a visible exam via Skype to determine if additional treatment is needed upon arrival. A ground transport official at Svalbard Airport said only about one dog a week has traveled to the mainland since the law took effect, compared to three a week before.

Two air carriers challenge governor's flight law rulings

Two complaints about the Svalbard governor's interpretation of flight rules are being reviewed by Norway's Directorate of Nature Management. The first is by Sundt Air, which hoped to fly six skiers to Longyearbyen on a Cessna 680, which the governor ruled was a private tourist flight. The second by Hesnes Air sought to fly its CEO and other management to Longyearbyen, arguing the trip's purpose was commercial rather than sightseeing.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy. E winds to 42 km/h. High -1C (-8C wind chill), low -2C (-9C wind chill).	Snow SE winds to 42 km/h. High 0C (-4C wind chill), low -2C (-8C wind chill).	Rain/snow. Variable winds to 15 km/h. High 0C (-2C wind chill), low -1C (-4C wind chill).	Rain/snow. Variable winds to 32 km/h. High 0C (-5C wind chill), low -3C (-8C wind chill).
24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight

Extended forecast: Sunday, p. cloudy, -2C (-9C), -4C (-10C), light 24:00h; Monday, p. cloudy, -1C (-5C), -3C (-7C), light 24:00h; Tuesday, cloudy, 1C (-2C), -2C (-5C), light 24:00h; Wednesday, cloudy, 0C (-3C), 0C (-4C), light 24:00h

Data provided by storm.no



Hundreds of Svalbard residents, above, including leaders and youths from the Russian settlement of Barentsburg, march in a traditional procession through the streets of Longyearbyen during Friday's Norwegian Constitution Day celebration. At right, a blizzard outside doesn't keep youths inside Svalbardhallen from indulging in free ice cream during an afternoon of music, games and other children's activities that are a traditional part of the holiday. Photos by Mark Sabbatini / Icepeople.



Ødegård, Sigernes take honors

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activities as the city's cultural advisor, Ødegård was praised for top-notch efforts at everything from choosing movies to organizing kids' talent shows to luring first-rate international performers to scripting picture-perfect ceremonies for visiting kings and queens.

"I think the thing that's really noticeable about him is everything is really professional and that's his special touch," said Christin Kristoffersen, head of Longyearbyen's municipal council, after the ceremony. "He's what makes things go from very good to awesome."

But even the best plans are vulnerable to Mother Nature and there was a significant chill – in attendance as well as the air – at this year's outdoor ceremonies as a one-day blizzard interrupted a long span of mild weather.

Several hundred people participated in the traditional procession through the streets of Longyearbyen, but many retreated to shelter before reaching the Skjæringa memorial endpoint. For those enduring the subsequent 20 minutes of anthems and speeches by Norwegian and Russian leaders, the tributes paid to the fallen soldiers of both countries who fought together during World War II made the wet and windy conditions a trifling hardship.

The elements didn't put a damper on the remaining – albeit indoor – festivities, as youths indulged liberally in free ice cream at Svalbardhallen mere minutes after the ceremony. The evening gathering at Kulturhuset, featuring more music and speeches in addition to

the awards presentations, was packed to standing-room-only capacity.

Ødegård, a 28-year resident of Longyearbyen as of June, got a few hours to recover from a long holiday workday before returning to the office Saturday to post speeches and awards presented during the holiday on the city's website.

He said there's always been intriguing cultural events while he's lived here, but there's significantly more now as the city's reputation and facilities have improved.

"The city is full of qualified musicians and actors, and of course this house is full (of events)," he said after the presentation. "I still want to develop this culture house to where inhabitants can have a good time year-round and to have big names from the mainland here."

Surprising Ødegård with the Tyfus award took a bit of subterfuge since he was responsible for accepting names and passing them on to the nominating committee. In his acceptance speech, he said it was a bit of a surprise to find out the list of names was incomplete as his was submitted directly to the committee chairman.

The winner of the other major award presented during Syttende Mai was Ida Sigernes, 18, who received the 10,000-kroner Youth Culture Grant. An acclaimed gymnastics performer with Sirkus Svalnardo, she was also praised for her extensive instruction work with younger students.

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

What's up

May 22

6 p.m.: Movie: "The Great Gatsby" (3D), U.S. romance/comedy, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

May 24

8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.: Registration for Longyearbyen summer school. Details at <https://skjema.kf.no/more/wizard/wizard.jsp?wizardid=2926>.

8 p.m.: Concert by Norwegian Arctic Philharmonic Orchestra. Program includes classic and original compositions, including Christian Lindberg's new "Kundraan and the Arctic Light." Kulturhuset.

May 24-25

Alternative medicine fair. Radisson Blu Polar Hotel. Details at <http://alternativmesse.no/svalbard>.

Evening performances by Linda Gail Lewis, '50s rock 'n roll singer. Barentz Pub.

May 25

10 a.m.: Cultural exchange in Barentsburg.

May 26

11 a.m.: Mass w/ distribution of 11-year-olds yearbooks and performance by Polargospel. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "The Great Gatsby" (3D), U.S. romance/comedy, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Paradise: Hope," French/German/Austrian drama, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

May 27

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

May 29

6 p.m.: Movie: "The Hangover, Part III," U.S. comedy, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

May 30-June 2

Mountaineering festival, featuring a four-day excursion to Trygghamna and Protektorfjellet. Details at www.toppturfestivalen.no.

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:

- *Arctic bacteria may prove life on Mars*
- *Swedish city bulldozed in quest for iron*
- *Greenland: We'll mine for independence*
- *Martha Stewart's cannibal polar bears*