

NASA

Venus, seen here during a transit across the sun in 2004, repeats the journey locally June 6.

## Spotting Venus

*Svalbard gets premium seat for last transit by planet until 2117*

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

There's this tiny dot, see, and if you stay up past midnight and then look directly at the sun for a few hours...

Wait! Come back! Let's try the more dramatic version.

A once-in-a-century opportunity to see the mysterious planet Venus crossing directly between the sun and the Earth takes place just after midnight June 6. An evening of lectures and other activities, plus designer glasses for the occasion, is scheduled at Svalbard

Museum and The University Centre in Svalbard.

Lest you doubt this is exciting, viewing parties are being thrown everywhere from the Outback to Stonehenge. And astronomers agree Svalbard is one of the best and most unique places in the world to be for the event.

"It is one of the places where the entire transit will be visible and where the sun never sets at this time of year due to the high latitude of the area," notes a statement from an astronomy team at the University of

See **ECLIPSE**, page 4

## Strike takes flight(s)

*Airport snarls starting Friday seen as Svalbard's largest potential impact due to nationwide walkout*

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

Flights this week and cruises starting next week in Svalbard may be thrown into turmoil by a nationwide labor strike that otherwise seems to be having little local impact so far.

The walkout by tens of thousands of public sector workers beginning May 24 is occurring entirely on the mainland, but expanding in size and spreading to remote regions including Tromsø. Airport officials are warning of "chaos" if union workers at the facilities fulfill their vow to join the strike Friday if contract disputes remain unresolved.

"We expect an operating capacity of 10 to 15 percent of normal," said Jo Kobro, a spokesperson at Oslo Airport, in an interview with NRK. "It will have enormous consequences for traffic at the airport. With the guards that are left we will give priority to bringing in crews to airplanes that may need to fly the planes to other airports, and then to passengers. Product deliveries and other work will be the lowest priority."

In Svalbard the only certainty is uncertainty,  
See **DISPUTE**, page 3

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## Kulturhuset gets floored

*Unightly stage already needs replacing; movie theater, cafe to close in July and August for work*

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

It's not quite a Broadway play shutting down after opening night, but the failed performance of a key player at Kulturhuset is forcing the new center to close for most of the summer.

The stage of the Longyearbyen performing arts center has quickly become unsightly due to

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Dancers perform on Kulturhuset's scarred stage.

## Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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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.

## Ordinary day here a top-five global thriller



L. CRAIG SMITH

A six-person group prepares to hit the trail during a snowmobile expedition this winter on Spitsbergen that was chosen by CNN as one of its five best adventure travel stories submitted by viewers. While the author, L. Craig Smith, narrates a trip that didn't go entirely smoothly it was hardly the stuff of local legend – or even all that unusual. The group consisted of "a lawyer, two writers, an ad executive, an Internet investor and a snowboarder ... led by a professional guide and cook." A blizzard and temperatures to minus 30 Celsius engulfed their camp for five days, with some tents collapsing from snow drifts and Smith suffering frostbite to his face. When the weather cleared they were able to locate some polar polars on the sheet ice. The trip back to Longyearbyen took a bit of extra time due to some errant navigations and snowmobile spills. And, um, that's it, ranking with whitewater rafting in India's Himalayas and winter hot-air balloon trips in Turkey for excitement (actually, none come across as truly daring, but CNN's intent seems to be offering adventure alternatives for "mainstream" travelers). Smith's report, with links to the others, is available at <http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-751651>.

## Icesheet

### *Random bits of the week's weirdness:*

We're feeling even more inadequate than usual this week thanks to an abundance of newsworthy items from *The Paper That's Worth More Than A Bathroom Read*, so we're offering a Special Bonus Theft item that doesn't really need any snark from us to establish its kooky credentials. The verbatim item from page three, before it was axed to make way for the fuel cleanup snafu at Isfjord Radio: "There's only a few short roads in Longyearbyen, but that isn't discouraging Robert Johansen from plans to rent RVs to tourists starting in March of 2013. 'In the German market alone there is 60 to 70 million people and there are some weirdos who get turned on by this, I am convinced,' he said. 'It also depends on where and how it is marketed.' He said he plans to buy to new motor homes, and has already been in touch with the governor's office and city officials to ensure such an operation is permissible" ... If you're having trouble grokking why this Transit of Venus thing is a big deal, this excerpt of a *Macleans* review of the new book "The Day the World Discovered the Sun" might illuminate you to the wonder and strangeness of it all: "(It) set the finest minds in Europe dashing off, to risk terrifying sleigh rides in the Siberian wilds, shudder with hypothermia in the Norwegian Sea, and hallu-

ciate in the grip of 'jail fever' in Mexico. Not all would return alive to the comfortable salons of royalty. (The book is) a sort of real-life literary Star Trek from the era of tall ships, terra incognita, and scientific Enlightenment" ... We've had as much fun as anyone mocking Nowhereisland, the project where British artist Alex Hartley is taking a big lump of Svalbard soil and rocks on a tour of the U.K. coast before camping out in London for the Olympics (he's bringing our precious soil back afterward). But the "exhibit" aimed at promoting climate change awareness, denounced by politicians as an "extraordinary folly" due to its high cost, is getting mostly rave reviews in ports where the barge is stopping. Also, at last count more than 7,000 people from nearly 100 countries have signed up as temporary citizens. "This looks great!" wrote "heyjudedj," a commenter at [www.thisissouthdevon.co.uk](http://www.thisissouthdevon.co.uk). "There's tons to do around the Olympics other than watch sporty stuff and this is brilliant." Given the other stuff dominating news about the Games – most notably the diabolical "brand exclusion zone" that bans nearly every food except McDonald's and all items with logos not from official sponsors within one kilometer of the Olympics village – we're beginning to think Hartley might be one of the few true winners at this international spirit thing.



AVINOR

Tromsø Airport, seen here during a quiet moment at the security gate, may be thrown into chaos Friday if union aviation workers follow through on a pledge to strike if a wage dispute is not resolved.

## Travel aside, impact of strike minimal

### DISPUTE, from page 1

with the status of flights from the mainland likely to remain unknown until late in the morning Friday, when the flight from Tromsø to Longyearbyen is normally scheduled to take off, said Morten Ulsnes, manager at Svalbard Airport.

"We would have to expect big delays," he said. "We don't know if we will be on a priority list or not on a priority list."

The airports in Oslo and Tromsø are both among those scheduled to go on strike.

The strike could also take a heavy toll on the cruising season. Major lines are canceling stops at all major Norwegian ports, including Tromsø, due to a walkout by maritime pilots who are required to meet and assist ships navigating through local waters. Voyages with stops in Svalbard are scheduled to begin next week but local tourism officials, like those at the airport, can do little but wait and see.

"Obviously that would not be very good news," said Trygve Steen, administrative director of Spitsbergen Travel.

Hurtigruten voyages are not impacted by the strike since the ships' captains are proficient in knowledge of Norwegian coastal waters and don't require a pilot, according to the ferry company.

Immediate impacts from travel limitations

may be significant, such as keeping non-local participants from racing in Saturday's Spitsbergen Marathon. Also, as with lengthy flight interruptions due to factors such as weather, mail and supplies may be held up.

But, unlike the mainland, most aspects of everyday life are going uninterrupted in Longyearbyen. Tax officials are still demanding forms, teachers are still making students take finals and trucks are still roaming the streets to pick up garbage.

"I think Svalbard is too small is to make a real impact that would have an effect as a result of going on strike," said Christin Kristoffersen, chairwoman of the Longyearbyen Municipal Council.

Similarly, Svalbard Lt. Gov. Lars Erik Alfheim said "so far we have not received any information that it is going to affect us."

One political impact earning headlines is the possible cancellation of a visit to Tromsø by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to discuss Arctic issues. Coming shortly after a much-publicized visit to Svalbard by Catherine Ashton, European Union foreign policy chief, Clinton's visit is seen as an effort by the U.S. to assert its claims to the lucrative oil, gas and shipping opportunities in the Far North.

**There's more! Visit [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net) for the complete story.**

## HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

### Upgrade means long lines at airport now, short ones later

A new security check facility at Svalbard Airport will hopefully mean shorter lines when completed July 1, but there may be longer waits in the meantime, according to officials. Included in the four-million-kroner upgrade is a larger X-ray space for passengers' items before and after screening. "We'd love to do this work at a more optimal time, for example, in January," said Airport Manager Morten Ulsnes. "But it did not work out that way. We also wanted to get this done before the absolute peak season in July and August."

### Lack of funds puts opening of Mine 3 museum in doubt

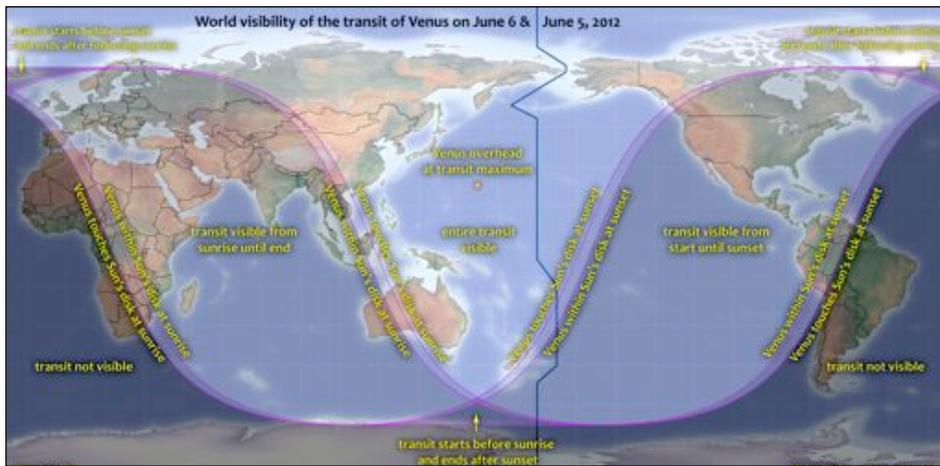
Lack of funds has put the Mine 3 museum on hold, with hopes of opening it on Store Norske's 100th anniversary in 2016 in doubt. The company's coal earnings have dropped sharply for the past three years, with a net loss expected this year, and it has provided only 6.4 million kroner of the projected 35 million kroner cost of the museum. The Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund also provided 1.5 million kroner. "It is clear that it will be exciting for Store Norske to show off the museum for the anniversary," said Per Andersson, the company's administrative director. But "it is not trivial work to take care Mine 3. It's all about money – and money we do not have right now. Therefore we must impress someone so that we get the money."

### Botched cleanup of Isfjord fuel leak results in new spill

A mishap during the cleanup of at least 100,000 liters of diesel at Isfjord Radio has resulted in another spill of about 100 liters of coolant, officials said. A long-term leak in a diesel storage unit resulted in the spill discovered in January, with all of the fuel dispersing into the ground. Cables filled with coolant placed in a cleanup area May 19 by AF Arctic were heated to at least 80 degrees Celsius to thaw the ground, but a hose broke during the process. The company, in a letter to Svalbard's governor, stated "it is in practice not possible to differentiate" between the coolant and diesel now that they are mixed together.

## Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly cloudy. N winds to 32 km/h. High -1C (-8C wind chill), low -4C (-12C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. N winds to 29 km/h. High 0C (-5C wind chill), low -1C (-9C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. NW winds at 7 km/h. High 0C (-2C wind chill), low -1C (-4C wind chill).	Cloudy. Variable winds to 7 km/h. High 0C (-2C wind chill), low -1C (-1C wind chill).
24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight
<b>Extended forecast:</b> Sunday, p. cloudy, 0C (0C), -1C (-3C), light 24:00h; Monday, p. cloudy, 0C (-1C), -1C (-3C), light 24:00h; Tuesday, p. cloudy, 0C (-2C), -1C (-3C), light 24:00h; Wednesday, p. cloudy, 0C (-2C), -1C (-3C), light 24:00h			
Data provided by yr.no			



A global map showing the visibility of the transit of Venus on June 5 and 6 2012. Spitsbergen is one of the few places in Europe where the entire passage will be visible. The weather forecast calls for partly cloudy skies between midnight and 6 a.m., when most of the transit will occur locally.

## Venus transit reveals worlds of data

### ECLIPSE, from page 1

Barcelona, which is planning a live broadcast of their observations from Spitsbergen at <http://serviastro.am.ub.edu>. "Therefore, researchers will be able to monitor it during the night with the sun on the horizon."

Another live broadcast is planned by the European Space Agency, whose satellite Venus Express is orbiting the planet, at <http://blogs.esa.int/venustransit>. ESA scientists will discuss research conducted with the satellite, with the transit offering a major opportunity.

"During the transit, Venus Express will make important observations of Venus' atmosphere that will be compared with ground-based telescopes to help exoplanet hunters test their techniques," an ESA press release states.

"Transits are also being used to search for exoplanets that may harbor life. If the planet has an atmosphere a small fraction of the light from the star will pass through this atmosphere and reveal its properties, such as the presence of water or methane."

Only six Venus transits have been observed since the invention of the telescope in the early 1600s. The first, in 1631, was merely recorded as an object passing in front of the sun. The verification it was the planet Venus in 1769 is hailed as "the day the world discovered the sun" and beginning of modern astronomy.

Because the orbital plane of Venus is not precisely aligned with Earth transits occur rarely and erratically – in pairs eight years apart, but separated by more than a century. The last transit was in June 2004, but the next

will not be seen until 2117.

Local events for the transit include:

- Lectures at UNIS beginning at 7 p.m. Tuesday. Thomas Widemann of the Paris Observatory will discuss the history of transits, Dmitry Titov of the ESA will discuss the history of Venus exploration and highlights of the Venus Express mission, and David Grinspoon of the Denver Museum of Natural History will discuss life on Venus and the planet's relevance to Earth's climate.

- Svalbard Museum will offer free admission and a book sale beginning at 7 p.m. A presentation featuring the Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund is scheduled at 9:30 p.m., followed by a screening of the fund-assisted music/video project "Polar Eufori" at 10 p.m.

The transit itself will begin in Svalbard at 12:04 a.m. Wednesday. As with any eclipse, special glasses (available at the museum viewing) or other visual aids are needed to avoid eye damage from looking directly at the sun. The hosted event at the museum is scheduled until 3 a.m., but the full transit lasts 6 hours and 40 minutes.

Hotel and tourism officials are reporting a small increase in visitors compared to normal on those days, but nothing like the excitement surrounding the total eclipse of the sun happening in Svalbard on March 20, 2015.

"We are fully booked on that one," said Trygve Steen, administrative director of Spitsbergen Travel.

**There's more! Visit [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net) for the complete story.**

## Kulturhuset closing for stage repairs

### REPLACE, from page 1

A new type of flooring used by the company installing it, said Roger Ødegård, the city's cultural advisor. The center opened 18 months ago and "for the past year we knew we couldn't (accept) it because there's a lot of problems there."

"The company who installed it made the decision, when we reported it to them, to replace it at once," he said. The company will pay for the new stage, which will have a different type of surface coating.

Six movie screenings will be cancelled due to the work, but "we don't have to pay salaries so we do not lose much," Ødegård said. Those months also tend to be among the slowest of the year due to the large number of residents away on holiday.

The closure comes during what's already a disappointing year for Kulturhuset, with the 120,000 kroner in sales 30 percent below projections, according to *Svalbardposten*.

**There's more! Visit [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net) for the complete story.**

## What's up

### June 2

10 a.m.: Spitsbergen Marathon, starting and finishing at Svalbardhallen. Starting times: marathon 10 a.m., half-marathon 11:30 a.m., 10K 12:30 p.m., 3K 12:45. Info and registration at [svalbardturn.no](http://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.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Men in Black 3" (3D), U.S. comedy/action, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

### June 4

11 a.m.: Environmental and Industrial Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

### June 5

7 p.m.-3 a.m.: Venus Transit lectures and viewing. Transit begins at 12:04 a.m.

June 6. Details at [www.svalbardmuseum.no](http://www.svalbardmuseum.no).

### June 6

6 p.m.: Movie: "Thor – Legends of Valhalla," Icelandic animated/family film dubbed in Norwegian, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Lecture (in English): "The Natural History of Polar Bears and Significance of Climate warming," by Ian Sterling. Svalbard Museum.

### June 9

7:30-9 p.m.: Longyearbyen Choir end-of-season gathering. Huset.

### June 10

4:30-7 p.m.: Longyear Day. Culture walk and other events at various locations.

9 p.m.: Movie: "Prometheus" (3D), U.S. sci-fi, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

### June 13

6 p.m.: Movie: "Snow White and the Huntsmen," U.S. action/drama, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

## What's online

[Icepeople.net](http://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:

- 6.2 quake south of Svalbard; no damage
- Greenland continues record ice melt
- Arctic passes 400 ppm CO2 milestone
- 'Sunscreen' for sky to combat warming?