



# An Arctic inkblot test

*Clinton's appeal for cooperation between U.S. and Norway seen as devious plot to shun others*

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

You don't have to be a policy expert – or even have the patience to read a Tweet – to understand why the Arctic is becoming the global political hotspot. Just scan the headlines from U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit Saturday to Norway's Far North:

- "America wakes up to the Arctic's potential," *Atlantic Sentinel*.

- "Enhanced cooperation in the north," *Aftenposten*.
  - "US, Norway sell bear's skin before bear is caught," *The Voice of Russia*.
  - "Clinton in Arctic: Promenade with profit in mind," *Ria Novosti*.
  - "The 'Great Game' in the Arctic could get nasty," *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto).
- Then there's this seeming oddity:
- "Norway pledges funds for maternal health care," *Views and News from Norway*.

Clinton's stop in Tromsø was part of a tour of Scandinavian countries to discuss resource development in the Arctic, and the territories

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POOL / REUTERS

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Jonas Gahr Støre talk Saturday aboard the Arctic research vessel *Helmer Hanssen* near Tromsø.

# Timely transit

*Clouds part at most critical times as Venus crosses midnight sun*

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

The slight parting of clouds at precisely the right moment might qualify as a heavenly miracle, even among this group of scientists following a celestial body of a more empirical kind.

Dozens of astronomers from all over the world gathered in Longyearbyen to watch the last Transit of Venus until the year 2117, but the

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Hundreds of scientists and amateur astronomers watch the Venus Transit near The University Centre in Svalbard. The area was considered one of the world's best places to see the full event.

# Church trio CD is quick inspiration



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Espen Rotevatn, left, Leif Magne Helgesen and Torunn Sørensen discuss their new album "Svalbard Kirkes Trio, 78°13'N," available now at Longyearbyen stores and online.

*Review: 'Svalbard Kirkes Trio' strong on vocals and diversity, but short length magnifies flaws*

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

"Leave 'em wanting more" is the mantra of performers and this album from the world's northernmost church certainly achieves that, for better and worse, during its scant 22 minutes.

"Svalbard Kirkes Trio, 78°13'N" is both the church's location and title of the debut recording by its longtime pastor Leif Magne

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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.

## Sightseeing the hard way



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Runners take their first steps of a 42-kilometer trek along most of Longyearbyen's major roads Saturday during the 18th annual Spitsbergen Marathon. For many the endurance test was more about novelty than competition, slogging in near-freezing temperatures past guards with rifles watching for polar bears. "This is the most unusual," said Luigi Ploner of Italy, a runner in the 60-plus age division who chose the event for his 100th marathon. "It's not very well known." The winner among the 43 participants was Kalle Jensen with a time of two hours, 50 minutes and 10 seconds, with Britta Homer the top women's finisher at 3:57:29. A total of 158 racers from 12 countries participated in the marathon, half-marathon, 10K and 3K events.

## U.S. visit keeps Arctic feuds hot

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and roles countries staking a claim to the area may play. The U.S. Geological Survey estimates the Arctic holds roughly a third of the world's undiscovered natural gas and 13 percent of the world's undiscovered oil, with environmental and territorial disputes making the race for riches even more contentious.

Perspectives of the visit between Clinton and Norway's leaders differ as widely within countries as between them.

Clinton's call for the U.S. to ratify the 1982 Law of the Sea treaty, signed by 160 countries so far, is denounced by many in the Republican-led Congress as the U.S. effectively ceding its sovereignty to the United Nations. Failure to sign, however, could block the U.S. from accessing the potential \$9 trillion in resources without a legal and/or military fight.

Most media coverage from the U.S. and Norway called Clinton's request part of an effort to promote cooperation between nations with Arctic territorial claims, politics within the two countries notwithstanding. But coverage in other countries such as Russia and Canada suggested a more devious intention by the U.S. to shut out all countries beyond its closest allies.

"The U.S. and Norway should not just sit down and agree about the Arctic, ignoring the opinion of other countries of the Arctic Council," said Russian Doctor of Mineralogy Igor Davidenko, according to *The Voice of Russia*. "Neither the U.S. nor Norway have the right to single-handedly dictate their will in this sphere."

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

## Icesheet

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

Since music and eclipses are what's probably of interest to our hypothetical readers this week (yet we put prattling polar politics at the top of the page – go figure), we decided to tout the latest **free full-length album at our revamped music page that will actually be operational this weekend**. While doing a bit of Googling to see who's selling the new "Svalbard Kirkes Trio" album online we came across Alan Morse Davies' "Svalbard [AS43]," a 2011 "collection of pieces based on the landscape of the Svalbard archipelago." It's not entirely our cup of tea, but will doubtlessly appeal to some fans of the ambient genre and the description is intriguing: "Source materials include the Welsh pibgryn (bagpipe), Italian zampogna (bagpipe) and ciaramella (shawm), hardanger fiddle plus some 78 records from the 1920s. All have been



It's 90 percent of Spinal Tap's album cover. But way cooler.

stretched, processed, re-tuned and edited into soundscapes ranging from the relatively static to the dramatic release." The album, along with a number of other full-length recordings and individual songs are available at [www.icepeople.net/audio.html](http://www.icepeople.net/audio.html). No, not all of the links to other portions of our soon-to-be-revised site work yet. Look for us to do one of the really important parts – games – next ... Speaking of fun, the local lottery that's even better than Powerball has announced its winners. We're referring, of course, to the annual drawing to pick up trash

for three days along the north coast of Spitsbergen at the end of July and beginning of August. A total of 22 people were picked from 174 applicants and, alas, we're not among them or on the 12-person waiting list. The list of winners is at [www.sysselmennen.no/hoved.aspx?m=44267](http://www.sysselmennen.no/hoved.aspx?m=44267).

## A most friendly Russian invasion



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Barentsburg residents perform a traditional Russian folk song and dance during the annual cultural exchange performance Saturday at Longyearbyen's Kulturhuset. The mix of traditional and modern performances was infused with campy introductions ("this is about a man who wants three wives, but sometimes he decides it's better to have only one wife, but sometimes four wives") and Norwegian flourishes in tribute to their neighbors. The performance came two weeks after Longyearbyen residents presented a variety show in the Russian mining community.

## HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

### Nordstjernen, built in 1956, starts final tour of Svalbard

The 56-year-old *Nordstjernen* is embarking on its final season in Svalbard, docking in Longyearbyen briefly today before taking its passengers on a tour of the west Spitsbergen fjords. The coastal steamer, the oldest currently in service in Hurtigruten's fleet, was a regular visitor to Svalbard from 1994 until 2008, when it was put into service in mainland waters. The ship is scheduled to make two Spitsbergen cruises a week until Aug. 20.

### Svolvær? Svalbard? Woman from U.S. goes to wrong one

When Ellen Reisner, 70, got off the plane and saw a stuffed polar bear at the baggage carousel, she realized she had gone completely wrong. She was supposed to fly from Oslo to Svolvær on Friday, but instead the Los Angeles resident ended up 1,100 kilometers to the north. "I got a shock and initially was very embarrassed," she said. "But after I arrived in my hotel room and got a glass of wine I thought 'This might be nice.'" She was supposed to meet her two children in the Lofoten Islands, but the ticket agent Oslo botched it due to the similar U.S. pronunciation of "Svolvær" and "Svalbard." Reisner wrote "Svolvær" on a piece of paper and showed it to the agent, but still wound up in the wrong place.

### Scientists to use helicopter to trap, tag geese for study

Danish researchers will use helicopters to chase pink-footed geese along the south side of Sassenfjorden, driving them into traps so they can be tagged by scientists conducting a population dynamic study. A large enclosure will be placed at the end of the Sassen River, where the birds will be fitted with neck rings and foot tags before they are released. The geese are molting when the catch is planned, meaning they have shed their wing feathers and cannot fly until new ones grow. Jesper Madsen, a researcher with Aarhus University, states in an application to Svalbard's governor the helicopter will spend about an hour chasing the birds, with tagging expected to take up to five hours.

## Musical sermon delivers, if too quickly

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Helgesen, along with deacon Torunn Sørensen and catechist Espen Rotevatn. The album is mostly a pleasing and remarkably diverse collection of a cappella performances, but weaker moments such as some piano interludes that add little to its character are frustrating as they eat into those precious few minutes.

The trio has been singing together since Rotevatn arrived in Longyearbyen last summer and they recorded the album at Kulturhuset during a three-day period just before Easter. While their repertoire is larger than the seven songs on the album, Helgesen said they limited the recording to the songs they liked best.

"It's better to do something good than not be satisfied," he said. "Also, when there are three of us we all need to agree."

"It's still an experience, and still the sound of Longyearbyen and Svalbard Kirkes."

That's undoubtedly the strength of this album, beginning with their individual and collaborative vocals on the opening track, "Sjå Krossen Blenkjer i Ishavssol," written in 1921 for the original church that burned down during World War II. That's followed by "Svalbardsalmen," a 2008 hymn that's become a stalwart of local church-related performances. Other songs range from negro spirituals to



• **Download** the song "Svalbardsalmen" free at [www.icepeople.net/trio.mp3](http://www.icepeople.net/trio.mp3).

• **Watch** the Svalbard Kirkes Trio perform at noon June 15 during the first-ever liturgy for all Norwegian bishops at the church.

folk, including "We Shall Overcome" as the lone performance in English.

The harmony of the alto/bass/baritone vocal trio is generally spot on, aside from a few stray moments. Rotevatn's piano playing on two songs is competent, but lacks the spirit of his better live performances.

Digital downloads of the album are available from numerous sellers like Amazon and iTunes at a considerably cheaper price than the CD, although the physical inset with its scenic photos and liner notes has a definite souvenir value. Quibbling about price seems petty anyhow, since proceeds are going to the church.

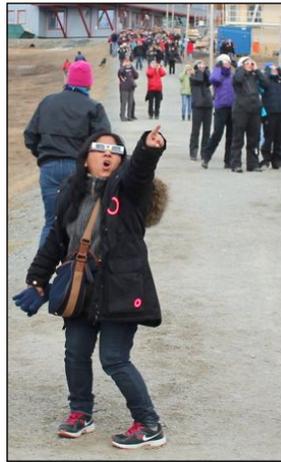
**There's more! Visit [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net) for the complete story.**

## Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy. N winds to 7 km/h. High 4C (2C wind chill), low 0C (-3C wind chill).	Cloudy. Variable winds to 18 km/h. High 2C (1C wind chill), low 1C (-4C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. NE winds to 7 km/h. High 0C (-2C wind chill), low -1C (-3C wind chill).	Cloudy. NE winds to 7 km/h. High 0C (-2C wind chill), low -1C (-3C wind chill).
24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight

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

Data provided by yr.no



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

A BBC team, left, broadcasts the Venus Transit live on the internet outside the Radisson Blu Polar Hotel. At right, an observer spots the sun emerging from the clouds just as the transit begins.

## Earth's 'evil twin' offers climate clues

### VENUS, from page 1

clouds showed little sign of clearing Tuesday night as the midnight hour approached. But just as Venus' passage between the sun and Earth began at 12:04 a.m. Wednesday (June 6) a tiny sliver of blue sky appeared right where everybody's telescopes and special viewing glasses were focused.

"There it is!" The exclamation came in a seeming progression of echoes from many of the several hundred professional and amateur skywatchers gathered outside The University Centre in Svalbard.

"I was worried it was going to be a total washout," said Janet Luhmann, a senior fellow at the University of California Berkeley. "I'm just glad I got to see some parts."

Luhmann was one of about 40 scientists at an annual conference to discuss the European Space Agency's Venus Express mission. The ESA spacecraft is the first to orbit Venus during a transit, adding extra excitement and research possibilities for the group.

"We're all involved in studying Venus our entire careers and this is a really special experience," said Sue Smreker, a NASA researcher.

Data collected during a transit can reveal numerous aspects of the planet's past and present, such as the presence of elements like water or methane that can be indicators of life. While Venus kept disappearing behind clouds for much of its six-hour journey across the sun, Smreker said they were able to observe the moments that mattered most.

"We're most interested in the the ingress and egress," she said.

Observing the transit from Svalbard doesn't provide any data differing from locations elsewhere in the world where the entire transit was visible, Smreker said. But scientists observing a past transit from differing latitudes used the data to calculate the size of the solar system.

Such revelations are why the verification of Venus transits in 1769 (the first sighting in 1631 was merely recorded as an object passing in front of the sun) is hailed as the beginning of modern astronomy. But they are at most a twice-in-a-lifetime experience, occurring in pairs eight years apart with a gap of more than a century between each pair.



EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY

The beginning of Venus' six-hour transit across the sun, seen at the upper left, is captured by scientists in Longyearbyen despite cloudy skies. Although much of the transit was hidden from view, astronomers said they were able to observe the beginning and end, the most critical portions for their research. A video of the transit as seen from Svalbard and images from elsewhere are at <http://blogs.esa.int/venustransit>.

This week's transit was preceded by an evening of lectures and social events at UNIS. Among the presentations was an overview of how Earth's "evil twin" offers clues about climate change and how it might affect our planet.

"They're basically the same mass, they seem to be basically made out of the same stuff, they have the same density and yet they've evolved in remarkably different ways," said David Grinspoon of the Denver Museum of Natural History.

It appears Venus experienced "what we call the runaway greenhouse" as its oceans became unstable due to evaporation, he said. At a certain breaking point the oceans fully evaporate, with the hydrogen and oxygen escaping into space while carbon dioxide remains as a greenhouse gas.

"In about one billion years the Earth will probably experience a runaway greenhouse," Grinspoon said. While that's not something to panic about now, he said the current acceleration in greenhouse emissions caused by man-made activity is a different story.

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

## What's up

### 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 p.m.: "Summerhits" concerts and shrimp buffet. The Longyearbyen Choir will perform with the visiting band Fauske and other musicians. The buffet is at 8:30 p.m., followed by dance music by Trio Intermezzo at 10 p.m. Huset.

### June 10

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

6-9 p.m.: Open house with free admission at Svalbard Museum. At 7 p.m. photographer Marcela Cardenas will present her DVD "Splendid Svalbard."

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.

### June 14

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

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

### June 15

Noon: Liturgy of the conference of all Norwegian bishops with Bishop Kjølås presiding. Music by Polargospel and the Svalbard Kirkes Trio. Svalbard Church.

7 p.m.: Midnight Blues Cruise to Barentsburg, featuring concert by Yngve & His Boogie Legs. Returns to Longyearbyen at 1 a.m. June 16. Details and tickets at [www.svalbardblues.com](http://www.svalbardblues.com).

## 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:

- *The start of Arctic science, 200 years ago*
- *Climate change threatens power output*
- *Warming tundra turning shrubs to trees*
- *Fake video of Shell oil party fools media*