



5X more rescues

Sharp rise in sea incidents this summer due to unawareness of terrain, weather, governor says

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

There's the ill-equipped guys taking an inadequate boat to Pyramiden who needed help – multiple times. A tour vessel that got too close to a calving glacier, killing a woman hit by the falling ice. The two men in their 70s desperately

trying to inflate a rubber raft while their sailboat was sinking at the northern tip of Spitsbergen.

The number of rescues at sea skyrocketed to 20 this summer, up from four during the summer of 2011, according to the Svalbard governor's office. The cause appears to be people lacking awareness of unpredictable hazards in the remote Arctic such as weather and uncharted subsurface obstacles.

The incidents involved 16 boats and four
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SYSELMANNEN

A helicopter navigates amidst glaciers as a rescuer dangles beneath. Officials responding to 20 incidents this summer, five times more than in 2011, say many people remain unfamiliar with hazards inherent in Arctic waters.



PRIVATE PHOTO

Jon Gunnar Hansen, left, Nick Weis-Fogh, center and Siv Lunde pause by the roadside during their 3,500-kilometer voyage in the "Kon-Tiki III" across India during The Rickshaw Run earlier this month.

TUK, TUK...

Svalbard trio makes a rough passage to India for 3,500K rickshaw race to aid needy

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

They're sort of the Jamaican bobsledding team in reverse.

Cold-weather natives racing in stifling heat. Spontaneous chaos instead of rigid discipline. A long, plodding course instead of one that flashes by in seconds.

On the other hand, they did cross the finish line with a contraption that gave up the ghost just before reaching it.

Svalbard residents Jon Gunnar Hansen, Nick Weis-Fogh and Siv Lunde completed a
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Tourists: Motors good, toil bad

Cruise and snowmobile tourism 'stable' for past five years, but non-motorized activities faltering

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

One could argue it takes a lot of effort just to get to this pristine Arctic setting, so sweating even more once here isn't an appealing vacation.

But officially it appears fewer non-motorized tour operators combined with things such as larger cruise ships are responsible for wild
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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Visitors to Pyramiden board a sightseeing boat earlier this month. Cruise travel rebounded significantly this year after dropping more than 25 percent between 2007 and 2011.

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.

Don't call them 'rain' deer



AFP

A reindeer grazes in Ny-Ålesund in the summer of 2010 following a winter with a long period of record temperatures and rainfall. A study by Norwegian researchers published this week in *Biology Letters* by Britain's Royal Society shows Svalbard's reindeer fare poorly during such winters, raising concerns about the species as climate change increasingly takes effect. Observations from 1995 to 2011 show the number of calves per female fluctuate sharply according to rainfall patterns from November to April. Similar changes were observed for a species known as the sibling vole, the only other herbivorous mammal on Spitsbergen. The declines are due to rain penetrating the snow and then freezing on the ground, enclosing vegetation with a thick layer of ice, making it hard for the animals to eat.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

Another warm tribute to "Frozen Planet" is resulting in **another cold shoulder for local filmmaker/producer Jason Roberts, whose name is nowhere to be found among those winning four Creative Arts Primetime Emmys this month.** The seven-part series documenting life in the polar regions and its turbulent status in an era of climate change (without, as many critics noted, browbeating viewers with tirades) won awards for best non-fiction series, cinematography, picture editing and sound editing. A bunch of names performing those duties are listed, but none from Svalbard. Those following the blazing successes of the highly acclaimed documentary (albeit mocked heavily for implying a scene with a polar bear mother and her newborns was in Svalbard when it was shot at a zoo) might remember Roberts also got shafted when invitations were sent out the red-carpet, mega-gala premier in New York City. Admittedly, people in general took a back seat to those limo-riding penguins as far as the press in NYC was concerned. Roberts isn't sweating the freeze-out. "I'm just the producer," he said after the Emmys were announced. As Chili Palmer of "Get Shorty" said in making the overnight transition from mobster to Hollywood honcho, "I don't think the producer has to know all that much" ... On the flip side, a now-disgraced local icon still has plenty of fervent supporters wanting him literally at the front and center of attention. **A bust of Robert Hermansen, the longtime Store Norske leader now in jail following a major corruption scandal, is supposedly getting the heave-ho from town, destined for a planned museum in the abandoned Mine 3, although it's far from certain that tourist attrac-**



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Even we make him hard to notice: Jason Roberts, the tiny person-shaped thing to the right, discusses producing the series "Frozen Planet" during a screening at Kulturhuset in March.

tion will actually happen. The bust was placed prominently in front of the post office/bank building when it was unveiled in 2009, only to be relocated a short time later to a far less noticeable corner inside the entrance of the main municipal building. A couple weeks ago the city's memorial committee, while not explicitly stating it might be embarrassing for politicians to be honoring a man whose antics are costing Store Norske dearly, unanimously decided the Mine 3 museum was the most appropriate spot. But the vote was far closer at this week's municipal council meeting, with members deciding by a single vote to put the bust there rather than back in front of the post office/bank building. The money quote obtained by Anders Fjellestad, one of the reporters for The Local Paper That Actually Chases People Down Afterwards, has a dissenter grumbling "I hope at least that the person in charge turns his face towards the hallway so we can see him when we go in and out."



GOOGLE MAPS



PRIVATE PHOTO



PRIVATE PHOTO

A map, top, shows the 3,500-kilometer route across most of India comprising The Rickshaw Run. At bottom left, a rickshaw gets a repair on the second day of the race at "the best repair shop in Guwahati." At bottom right, the seven-horsepower vehicles head to the finish line via a "very bumpy and hot charmer stage" Monday, wrapping up the two week event.

Rickshaw ends race with final gasp

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3,500-kilometer passage across most of India earlier this month during The Rickshaw Run. The race, featuring 67 teams from 20 countries, is a "pan-Indian adventure in a seven-horsepower glorified lawnmower (that's) easily the least sensible thing to do with two weeks," according to The Adventurists, British group that organized the event to raise funds for India's impoverished regions.

The Svalbard trio, journeying in an icicle-decorated rickshaw dubbed the "Kon.Tiki III," raised about 20,000 kroner from supporters for water improvement projects, which they said was their motivate for participating. That and "a fit of spontaneity and boredom made is why we signed on," Weis-Fogh told *Svalbardposten*.

Load road trips in India are stressful even in a reliable car with air conditioning, and the Svalbard trio had to cope with more than just being crammed in a ramshackle heat incubator. On the second day of the race they got up, had a cup of chai and then met the regional manager of the local police force, who offered an escort

through a city rife with "a lot of fussing, terror assaults and kidnapping," Weis-Fogh wrote in a Sept. 11 post on the trio's Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/groups/360197177382993>).

But acclimating to Indian navigation and culture came quickly along the "un-route" from Meghalaya's capital Shillong to Jaisalmer in Rajasthan, with Lunde becoming "a true Indian, fearless and with a horn on the thumb button." Most of their posts focus on the locals and other race teams encountered.

They experienced a final drama at the finish line Monday.

"A mile before the finish on a downhill with full acceleration in about 35-degree heat there came a bang from the engine followed by silence," Hansen wrote the following day. "We let the clutch out gradually and the engine coughed once. We passed the finish with various noises from the engine compartment. Amazingly well-timed within reason. I do not think the Kon Tuki III holds one more day."

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Agency: Classic Pizza breaks labor, wage, health laws

Classic Pizza is violating labor laws with a 48-hour work week, not complying with employees health requirements, and possibly paying substandard wages, according to the Norwegian Labor Inspectorate. The agency conducted an unannounced inspection in August after receiving tips about the Lompensenteret restaurant. Officials said employees typically work eight-hour days, six days a week, exceeding the 38-hour legal maximum. In addition, records are not clear about how much compensation in salary and housing employees are receiving. Sam Ziaei, Classic Pizza's general manager, denied the restaurant is in violation, and there is "talk of a misunderstanding because of the language" between the Iranian manager and his mostly Thai employees. He acknowledged not knowing how long each employee works because no records are kept, but estimates 25 hours a week is average.

Svalbard not complaining enough, ombudsman says

An agency receiving 3,000 complaints a year has a complaint of its own: None are from Svalbard. Norwegian Ombudsman Arne Fliflet said the last complaint from the area was in 2007 and he wants to hear gripes in a similar ratio as the mainland. "It may be that we are little known," he said during a trip to Svalbard this week with about 50 associates celebrating the agency's 50th anniversary. "By taking a trip like this, both the residents and the management become aware of us."

Barentsburg's restoration violates more building rules

Barentsburg continues to struggle with regulatory requirements while upgrading and improving facilities in the Russian mining community. A summer inspection of new scaffolding found it was not installed securely, according to the Norwegian Labor Inspectorate. "The shortcomings consisted improper access, lack of handrails, inadequate walkways and that workers who ran a roofing of the buildings were not secured sufficiently," the audit report states. Work was halted until the scaffolding was installed correctly.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly cloudy. NW winds to 22 km/h. High -3C (-8 wind chill), low -7C (-11C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. W winds to 18 km/h. High -3C (-7C wind chill), low -7C (-11C wind chill).	Cloudy. W winds to 15 km/h. High 0C (-4C wind chill), low -3C (-7C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. S winds to 11 km/h. High 0C (-3C wind chill), low -2C (-5C wind chill).
Sunrise 6:59a; sunset 6:34p	Sunrise 7:06a; sunset 6:27p	Sunrise 7:13a; sunset 6:19p	Sunrise 7:21a; sunset 6:11p
Extended forecast: Sunday, p. cloudy, 0C (-4C), -3C (-7C), light 10:36h; Monday, cloudy, 0C (-4C), -2C (-6C), light 10:20h; Tuesday, cloudy, 2C (0C), -2C (-7C), light 10:05h; Wednesday, cloudy, 3C (0C), 2C (-1C), light 9:49h			
Data provided by storm.no			



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Tourists on skis haul sleds near Longyearbyen as they train for an expedition during the spring of 2011. Non-motorized activities, once seen by tour operators as rising due to more interest in a unobtrusive Arctic experience, dropped sharply between 2007 and 2011, according to the governor's office.

'Stable' still means less tourism

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fluctuations in a five-year analysis of visitor numbers by the Svalbard governor's office.

Tourism has boomed since Parliament designated such activity a priority of industrial development for Svalbard during the early 1990s, with visitors spending 86,000 nights in Longyearbyen compared to 24,000 in 1993, according to a report released this week by the governor.

"The last six years, the numbers have stable between 83 000 and 89 000 nights," notes the report, which analyses visitor statistics between 2007 and 2011.

Similarly, organized dogsledding tours increased from about 500 in 1997 to about 3,300 in 2009, and cruise ship passengers rose from about 15,000 in 1997 to 33,000 in 2007.

The industry was hit hard by the global recession beginning in 2008, with other factors such as inclement weather and volcano eruptions that grounded air traffic playing a role during peak visitor periods. Some operators managed to maintain remain relatively healthy – and showed strong rebounds this year, which falls outside the study's timeframe – but the trend generally favored larger-scale operations

over smaller, independent ones.

"Cruise and snowmobile tourism has remained stable over the past five years," the report notes. "Non-motorized tourism statistics, show, however, a marked decrease."

But even "stable" numbers during the reporting period paint less than rosy picture. Overnight cruise ship passengers dropped more than 25 percent from their 2007 peak to about 24,000 in 2011. Visitors participating in organized snowmobile tours dropped from about 5,800 in 2007 to about 3,000 in 2010.

But even more severe was the decline in field days for hiking, skiing and glacier tours, which dropped from more than 6,000 in 2007 to about 4,000 in 2010 to about 1,600 in 2011. Similarly, dogsledding tours dropped from their 2009 peak of 3,300 to about 1,400 in 2010 and 1,500 in 2011.

"(This is) partly because some of the firms with longer such trips have closed down or scaled down considerably on the task," the governor's report states. However, "from 2012 on a new operator in the dogsledding market is expected to fill part of the hole."

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

Sea rescues up fivefold in 2012

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larger vessels, ranging in severity from moorings coming loose to several vessels running aground and taking on water.

The safety of Svalbard sea voyages received widespread attention this spring when Britain's government issued a no-travel warning for cruisers, citing the natural hazards and lack of ability to respond quickly with adequate personnel in all situations. Norwegian government and tourism officials chided the warning, noting constant improvements to equipment, training and safety awareness efforts, and it appeared to have no effect on cruisers who flocked to Svalbard in record numbers.

But despite those efforts, many navigating in the area's waters need to do a better job of familiarizing themselves with local conditions, said Acting Lt. Gov. Per Andreassen.

"It is important to have updated charts, but one must also be aware that not all areas are adequately identified," he said in a prepared statement.

Andreassen said it's also important to be aware weather forecasts are not always accurate for the different areas of Svalbard.

"Especially for Arctic weather is the rapid shifts and major local differences," he said.

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

What's up

Sept. 26

6 p.m.: Movie: "Magic Mike," U.S. drama/comedy, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

Sept. 27-29

Oktoberfest, featuring dozens of beers, a barbecue and evening concerts in an outdoor tent. Radisson Blu Polar Hotel. Details at www.spitsbergentravel.com

Sept. 29

Noon-3 p.m.: Open day at Longyearbyen Fire Station.

Noon-4 p.m.: Open day at Longyearbyen Science and Education Forum. UNIS.

Sept. 30

6 p.m.: Movie: "Tigre & Tatoveringer," Danish animated/children's film, all ages. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Hope Springs," U.S. drama/comedy, all ages. Kulturhuset.

Oct. 1

Q3 meter reading due.

Oct. 3

6 p.m.: Movie: "Barbara," German drama, all ages. Kulturhuset.

Oct. 4

Sale of surplus government furniture, time to be announced. Proceeds benefit annual NRK telethon. Statsbygg.

Oct. 5

8 p.m.: Movie: "Hypnotisören," Swedish crime/thriller, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

Oct. 6

10 a.m.-4 p.m.: Flea market at UNIS. Fundraiser for annual telethon.

1 p.m.: Relay race to center of Longyearbyen. Fundraiser for telethon. Details at svalbardturn.no.

Oct. 7

10 a.m.: Flea market at UNIS.

Annual car wash by governor to raise telethon funds. Time to be announced. Governor's garage building.

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:

- *Russian bishop 'consecrates' North Pole*
- *Oil giant Total opposes Arctic drilling*
- *Melting Greenland weighs risks, pluses*
- *Bigfoot, bald polar bears invade Arctic?*