



End of Russia mine?

Safety remains unacceptable in , Barentsburg, fixes may not be possible, investigation declares

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Barentsburg's coal mine is so structurally unsound it may not be possible to operate, according to Norway's Labor Inspectorate, which has twice rejected appeals to reopen the mine following serious injuries to a worker Sept. 10, the seventh accident since May of 2012.

Safety training and attitudes also continue to be described in withering terms in the most recent investigation by the agency, *Svalbardposten* reported this week. It states Trust Arkikugol, the Russian state-owned company that oversees the mining community, has no control over the rock stresses in the mine, meaning it will remain closed indefinitely.

"Until adequate measures are in place, mining in our opinion represents an imminent risk of injuries to workers, so it is immediately necessary for orders to stop," the agency's report states.

But because the mine is deep, with the most recent accident occurring 540 meters below sea level and 620 meters underground, and the horizontal and vertical rock stresses are so

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Birger Amundsen, right, meets with Christopher Engås, left, and Christian Nicolai Børke to discuss articles for Amundsen's final issue as editor, published last Friday, as he retires after nine years.

Provoking news

Svalbardposten Editor Birger Amundsen retires after yanking newspaper into modern era

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

When Birger Amundsen started his first newspaper job as the editor of *Svalbardposten* he quickly learned readers didn't like changes, even small ones.

He made them anyways. Big ones. And when people complained he welcomed the anger.

"I see that as good," he said. "More angry is more positive because people care about this paper, people feel like this paper belongs to them."

Amundsen, 65, is retiring after nine years in charge of the world's northernmost newspaper. Despite dragging it – kicking and screaming – into the modern era by overhauling its decades-old newsletter format and establishing a Web presence, he fervently adheres to a dying mentality of old-school journalism. Blunt, more comfortable with coal miners

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Arctic oil mess cloying Svalbard

New government backs off many northern projects, but one field may trigger major treaty disputes

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Forget investing in oil futures. The real money might be if anyone can come close to predicting just what is the area's oil future.

Days after Norway's incoming Conservative ruling party announced it's abandoning the most controversial Arctic drilling projects, reports elsewhere focused on how a still-planned

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OLE JØRGEN BRATLAND / STATOIL

It's just one little rig: But this newly discovered Barents Sea oil field is believed to include waters in Svalbard. Drilling could lead to a new support facility on Bjørnøya and international feuds.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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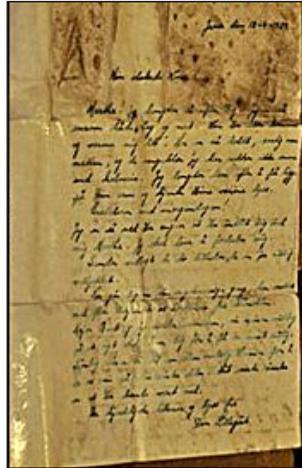
Corrections policy

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.

Love's not such a mystery after all



PRIVATE



JOSTEIN NORDSTRØM

A mysterious love letter from a Svalbard worker to his wife in 1929, above left, gets people throughout Norway guessing its history after being discovered by Martin Øen, above right, and Jostein Nordstrøm at the summit cairn on Lunckefjellet in late September. Adding to the riddle was a newspaper clipping from 1958 featuring the letter's author, Bernhard Luncke, then 64, holding a pair of foot warmers "that will keep his feet warm" during a mapping project in Antarctica. But speculation about their placement came to an anticlimactic conclusion when Magnus Halset, Luncke's great-grandson, told *Svalbardposten* he put copies of the letter and article in the cairn in April of 2012 at the suggestion of teacher, hoping others would enjoy reading about the Arctic pioneer.



PRIVATE

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

OK, everybody take a good look at the flash-blinded reindeer to the right. Now look back here. That's the price the native dwellers pay due to littering in Svalbard. Two guys doing police/environmental work on the government payroll found the animal snagged in netting and ropes Monday night at Vestpynten, according to the Local Paper of Record Turnover. One of the guys was able to cut the deer loose using a pocket knife, but they'd like to remind people Christmas is coming soon and taking out one of Santa's helpers because you're too lazy to haul your crap out isn't going to land you on anybody's nice list ... Another local animal encounter that did get someone on a nice list is captured below as the photographer, Laura Dyer, won second prize in the annual Oceans of Life photo competition run hosted by BirdLife South Africa. Unfortunately, our lousy copy-machine quality fish-wrapper can't capture the true artistry of the



LAURA DYER / BIRDLIFE SOUTH

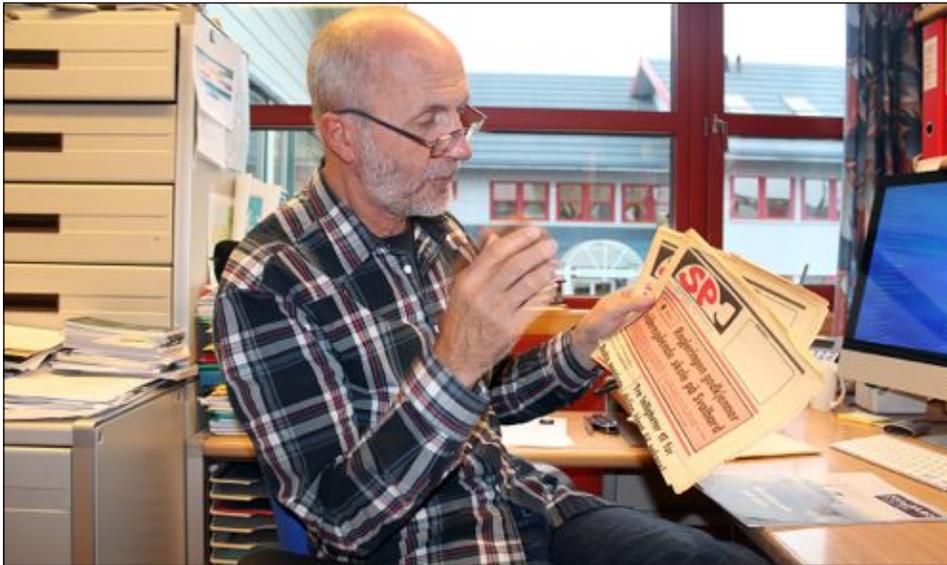
Trust us, this looks way better without the "auto" fixes by Photoshop: But the grayer wing and eye might be hard to see on this page. Spend some time with the real thing online.



TROND OLSEN / SYSSELMANNEN

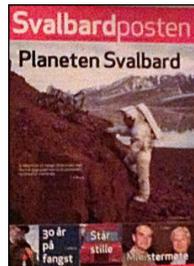
Look, life's tough enough with all the hunters: Would you mind not getting our heads screwed up in your messy entanglements?

photo, where most of this black-legged kittiwake's features are barely discernible against the glacier where it's seeking shelter. The longer you look at it, the more detail you see. To try it, check out Dyer's picture and a gallery of other winners at <http://tinyurl.com/me8fx2r> ... Here's something for those who think we spend too much time making fun of climate skeptics: Environmental chemist and author Klaus L.E. Kaiser, in a *Canada Free Press* article headlined "The Nuisance Palm Trees," offers a hypothetical visit by the new prime minister to the Arctic community of Iqaluit in the year 2034. It's described as "a splendid affair, reminiscent of the opening of the Olympic summer games in Spitsbergen, two years earlier, but without any of the normally common Aurora Borealis night illumination." OK, it's satire and all, but it stretches even that creative genre to suggest we'd ever allow McDonald's to become our primary food source just because of some "sponsorship" thing.



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Svalbardposten Editor Birger Amundsen explains only two issues have been published as a "real" newspaper, with readers revolting at the change in 1979. Amundsen also encountered hostility by changing a decades-old newsletter-like design, bottom left, into a magazine-like appearance in 2006, bottom center, and the current format in 2007.



As paper changes, so do some attitudes

BIRGER, from page 1

than at a chamber of commerce luncheon, and disdainful of toothless editors terrified of articles that might offend readers and advertisers.

While the approach has paid off – *Svalbardposten* was named Norway's best local newspaper in 2010 and he's now seen by many as a local icon – he has no trouble focusing his critical lens on himself. In an interview published in his final issue Friday, he was asked about people nicknaming the paper "Birgerposten" and calling him a word that translates roughly to "pain in the ass."

"All of the characteristics are correct from the point of view of people who offer them," he responded. "People often consider good journalism to be issues they agree with, while bad journalism are issues they do not agree with."

While *Svalbardposten* was Amundsen's first newspaper job, journalism and the Arctic date back to being "born as far north in Norway as you can (legally) be."

"I came from a fishing village, no fancy jobs," he said. "People in those places are very

down-to-earth. Up here there's a reason I prefer miners."

Amundsen studied journalism and electronics engineering, then spent 20 years producing shows for NRK before coming to the newspaper. Much of his time was spent in Svalbard, which he first visited in 1973 and subsequently wrote multiple books about.

"I liked NRK, but I loved Svalbard more," he said of his decision to leave. Also, "my marriage was going bad, so that's kind of a kick in the ass to do something different."

"It was hell" transitioning from months-long projects to the sprint of a weekly newspaper, Amundsen said. But he quickly adjusted and started making changes. As he retires with plans of completing another book about Svalbard, he's finding some old-timers who resisted him adapted as well.

"What's going to happen when you leave?" he said, quoting their reaction. "Who's going to take care of the history?"

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Governor clamps down on Jason Robert's film projects

Tough new restrictions on film projects in east Svalbard are being imposed by the governor's office following a series of problems with Jason Roberts and his production company. Roberts' company was fined 50,000 kroner for filming a man narrating from inside a cage being attacked by a polar bear, footage of which became infamous worldwide. He obtained permission to use a protected hunting lodge in the area for logical purposes in 2007 and the governor had extended this year's expiration date to 2014, but has now rescinded it. Trond Espen Haug, environmental advisor to the governor, said officials want to provide permits for specific projects rather than time periods. Furthermore, in a letter to Roberts, the governor's office stated "documentation and dissemination projects that require a permit shall primarily take place outside nature reserves," preferably in central Spitsbergen.

Bydrift: New Museumsveien bridge should be one-way

Replacing the damaged bridge at Museumsveien with a narrower one that includes a separate crossing for pedestrians is being recommended by Bydrift officials, who say it will save money without notably affecting vehicular traffic. A four-meter-wide bridge would allow a single vehicle, rather than the double-wide capacity of the bridge closed earlier this year, but numerous partial closures making the bridge one-way wasn't a significant problem, said Jørn Myrland, daily leader of the infrastructure agency. An emphasis will also be made with the bridge and others in Longyearbyen to ensure the foundation allows proper flow of water to avoid the damage resulting in the closure.

No charges for researchers in death of anesthetized bear

An investigation of a polar bear who died after being sedated by researchers is being dropped without charges by the Svalbard governor's office. The bear, anesthetized Sept. 4 at Edgeøya by Norwegian Polar Institute researchers, apparently woke and moved on its own before being discovered dead two days later by the same team.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy. E winds to 39 km/h. High 1C (-5C wind chill), low -1C (-7C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. Variable winds to 39 km/h. High 1C (-4C wind chill), low -3C (-7C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. NW winds to 49 km/h. High -1C (-6C wind chill), low -7C (-15C wind chill).	Snow. NW winds to 59 km/h. High 5C (-13C wind chill), low -10C (-19C wind chill).
Sunrise: 8:34a, sunset: 4:52p	Sunrise: 8:43a, sunset: 4:43p	Sunrise: 8:51a, sunset: 4:34p	Sunrise: 8:59a, sunset: 4:26p
Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -1C (-7C), -5C (-9C), light 7:08h; Monday, cloudy, -5C (10C), -8C (-14C), light 6:50h; Tuesday, cloudy, -2C (-8C), -8C (-13), light 6:31h; Wednesday, snow, -2C (-7C), -8C (-14C), light 6:12h			

Data provided by storm.no

By the way, they also have books



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Local kids pit their pixel prowess against machine and each other Saturday in the new youth wing at Longyearbyen Library. The room adjacent to the main wing was primarily used for meetings until undergoing extensive renovations this summer. The new section more than doubles the library's previous number of user-available computers, offers a variety of gaming and educational software as well as network play, features a large collection of movies and music (the latter of which can be listened to in a surround-sound audio chair), and – yes – reading material from comics to classics.

Barentsburg mine may stay closed

HAZARDOUS, from page 1

great, the agency is questioning whether it even possible to "have control and measures for the rock stresses in this mine."

Trust Arkikugol officials did not respond to requests from *Svalbardposten* for comment, according to the newspaper.

A Ukrainian man in his 50s had a leg crushed when it became trapped in machinery in the Sept. 10 accident. That followed the death of a 27-year-old Ukrainian when he was caught in an avalanche in June, the second fatality since last year. There have been a series of other accidents and closures since the mine reopened in 2010, after being shut for more

than two years due to a fire that killed three men.

Previous Labor Inspectorate investigations deemed Barentsburg's safety culture "totally unacceptable" and the latest report suggests little improvement. One of the harshest criticisms came after Nikolaj Mikitenko, the mine's director, told investigators the high number of young and inexperienced workers is because quality vocational colleges for the profession no longer exist in Russia or the Ukraine. Workers get five days of safety training in Barentsburg before they are sent into the mine.

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

New oil field may leak into Svalbard

MURKY, from page 1

site may cross into Svalbard's waters, resulting in a fierce international debate and the need to construct a helicopter-ready support facility on Bjørnøya. All of the controversies swirl around battles that have raged domestically and internationally for years, if not decades.

The plan to abandon Arctic projects was announced last week when Conservative Party Leader Erna Solberg, near certain to become Norway's new prime minister this month, failed to form an expected four-party center-right ruling coalition. Instead, a minority coalition including only the controversial Progress Party is planned that, among other things, pledges not to continue oil projects in Lofoten, Vesterålen and Senja.

But several oil and gas projects already in planning and development in the Barents Sea will continue, including apparently the Wisting

Central field – Norway's highest discovery ever – which could trigger major international controversies about possible violations of the Svalbard Treaty.

A major find could stretch the field into Svalbard, with Norway arguing such activity would be permitted due to how its continental shelf and an exclusive economic zone are defined. But disputes about those boundaries, notably with Russia, have been long and bitter, and the Wisting project may lead to legal challenges from other countries arguing all signatories of the 1920 treaty are entitled to participate in commercial activities.

"In this issue, there are no friends, only national interests," said Johan Petter Barlinthaug, chairman of the U.K.'s North Energy company, in an interview with *Teknisk Ukeblad*.

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

What's up

Oct. 9

6 p.m.: Movie: "Turbo," U.S. family/animated, all ages. Kulturhuset.

Oct. 10

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

Oct. 12

Noon: Open day at UNIS Science Center. Exhibitions, lectures and competitions as university celebrates 20th anniversary.

Oct. 13

10:30 a.m.-2 p.m.: Activity day at Kullungen kindergarten, with climbing tower open and food sales. Proceeds benefit annual NRK charity auction.

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Ernest and Celestine," French animated film dubbed in Norwegian, all ages. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "White House Down," U.S. drama/action, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

Oct. 14

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

Oct. 15

8:30 a.m.-4 p.m.: Daylong workshop on bullying presented by Erling Roland, a professor of educational psychology at the Centre for Behavioral Research in Stavanger. Kulturhuset.

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

7 p.m.: Evening Mass and fireplace gathering. Svalbard Church.

Oct. 17

4-7 p.m.: Crafts and food fair by local students to benefit NRK charity telethon. Longyearbyen School.

Oct. 19

5-10 p.m.: Thai feast, with proceeds going to NRK charity telethon. UNIS.

Oct. 20

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

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:

- *Permanent climate change starts in 2020*
- *Shutdown may nix U.S. Antarctic season*
- *Arctic 'hybrid' species are cute – but fake*
- *Arctic melt means more pirate chases*