



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

"Saint" Nicholas, hidden in his workshop in Mine 2B, surely indulges in a cackle as his mailbox is finally set out this week at the base of the mountain in Nybyen, days after dozens of local children tried in vain to deliver their letters to him during an Advent torch procession Sunday.

SLACKER SANTA!!

Stiffs local kids by neglecting to put mailbox out for Advent; helpers try to cover his deceit

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

It wasn't quite "Santa to Kids: Drop Dead!" After all, the Jolly Ol' Elf didn't even bother to pay attention to their pleas in the first place.

Longyearbyen youths were unable to deliver their letters to "Saint" Nicholas during

the town's annual celebration of Advent on Sunday because His Largeness failed to put up his mailbox below his secret workshop in Mine 2B.

Hundreds of torch-carrying residents refrained from climbing the hillside and storming his workshop. Instead they continued their procession to the town square where – like the Whos who were unfazed by the Grinch – they circled a newly lit Christmas tree and joined in song.

How did such a dereliction of duty occur?
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Frigid words for NPI

Research group fares worst in international review; strategy, organization, some work faulty

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Poor organization, lack of strategy and two weak fields of research are cited in giving the Norwegian Polar Institute the lowest rating in an international evaluation of Norwegian research groups.

The evaluation published earlier this month is based on research from 2005 to 2009. An NPI spokeswoman said the agency was in a transition period at the time, and its work has improved since then with the addition of funds and staff.

But the study commissioned by the Norwegian Research Council states NPI's results are "surprising given that they are in a growth phase, with optimum funding." Both general and specific deficiencies are criticized with harsh words.

"The organizational structure is far from clear," the report states. "Most of the research groups submitted for evaluation are actually discipline-based sub-groups which do not have their own coherent research strategy."

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Clearer, sort of, on E. Svalbard

Concerns from tourism, science groups reflect broader worries about future limits of access

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

It's hardly a complete look at all sides of a critical proposal for Svalbard's future, but what everyone else is stating might just be gibberish to some anyhow.

Two reports from working groups involved in a new management plan for the Eastern Svalbard Nature reserves are now

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HALVARD PEDERSEN / SYSSELMANNEN

The NordsysseL cruises in the northeast Svalbard bay of Faksevågen. A proposed new management plan being reviewed by various agencies greatly restricts access to the region.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

Editor

Mark Sabbatini

Staff writer/photographer

Karla Paz

Copy editor

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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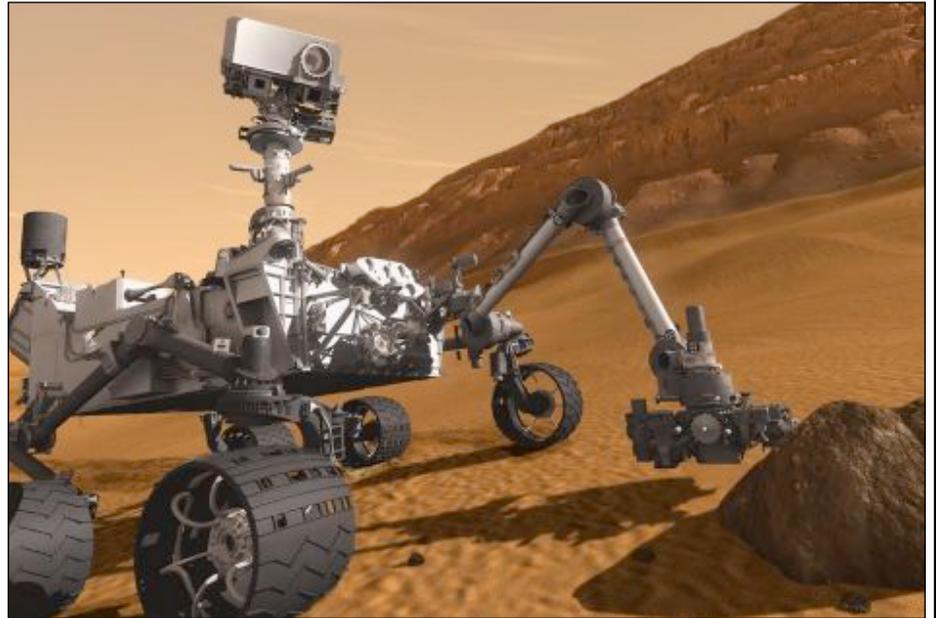
Corrections policy

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.

Mars beats Earth



NASA

An Atlas V rocket, at right, carrying the Mars Rover, above, lifts off Saturday from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida. The NASA rover is scheduled to land on Mars next August and spend two years looking for chemical traces of life. Two instruments on board were tested in Svalbard by the Norwegian-led research group AMASE. Meanwhile, an ICI-3 rocket designed to study Earth's Northern Lights is still awaiting favorable launch conditions in Ny-Ålesund.



NASA

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

The rooms and location are meh, and the food might give one pause, but it's still a lodge worthy of a rave review in one of London's biggest newspapers. Huh? Well, certain eccentricities are expected since we're talking about Svalbard and in truth *The Telegraph* pretty much nails it with their Sunday critique of Mary-Ann's Polarrigg. Style and character score nine out of a possible for things such as accessing the restaurant "through a faux mine shaft (that) is a cross between a greenhouse and a trophy room, with the rear end of a stuffed polar bear protruding from a wall." Also scoring high with eights are service and value for the money ("a boon for budget travelers"). Food gets a seven, with the review noting "starters include cod tongues and whale tartar; seal and reindeer steaks are among the main courses. Rich and interesting, but not to everyone's taste." The basic rooms earn a six and the location ("between old coal mine workings and polar research storage units") bottoms out at five ... Getting an actual award for their highlighting of our strangeness are Tina Marie Dingsøy Vik and Øyvind Vestrheim, authors of the cookbook "Arktiske Fristelser" ("Arctic Temptations"). It was among the five finalists in the annual Best Norwegian Cookbook competition. Comments note "much of the 'action' takes place outdoors,

where they hunt caribou, Arctic char, seal (which you probably eat every day), and grouse." For readers, however, "all that depends the willingness of your neighbors at the North Pole to find ingredients for delicious dishes that are equally delicious photographed" ... It's not exactly in our back yard, but the latest example of Russia's ambitious (if not always sensible) efforts to conquer the Arctic is a 5,000-person tourist dome on the island of Kotelny, an uninhabited land mass off the north coast about 1,000 kilometers from the North Pole. Sounds more advanced and luxurious than the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station, which we can say from personal experience was one of the greatest places on Earth to throw a New Year's Eve party. But sadly that dome had to be scraped because polar terrain has a habit of shifting around under large and complex structures ... And for all the local climate researchers, the demoralizing stat of the day: While more than 97 percent of climate scientists believe climate change is real and man-made, a survey published in the journal *Nature Climate Change* finds 66 percent of U.S. residents believe either there's a lot of disagreements among scientists or they don't think it's happening. When one resident was confronted with the findings, the response was "not too long ago 99 percent of the scientists agreed that the Earth was flat."



SEBASTIAN GERLAND / NORWEGIAN POLAR INSTITUTE

Stephen Hudson of the Norwegian Polar Institute, Marcel Nicolaus of the Alfred Wegener Institute and Ruibo Lei of the Polar Research Institute of China measure light under sea ice in Kongsfjorden earlier this year. NPI's sea ice and oceanography groups are harshly criticized in a new report.

Report: NPI needs major changes

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"There does not appear to be any kind of coherent strategic planning process in the organization; if there is, it was not adequately described," the report adds. "The leadership does not appear to be particularly strong. Because of the nature of their mandate from Government they need to maintain a wide range of expertise. As a consequence there are some disciplines resting in the hands of a single individual; this makes them vulnerable to staff losses."

The quality of work by the six research groups at the institute varies widely, according to the report. Faring worst were the sea ice and oceanography communities which received ratings between "weak" and "satisfactory," the lowest of any in the nationwide assessment. The report states those communities publish little and the findings are seldom used by other researchers.

On the other hand, marine geology and glaciology "are strong sub-groups with fairly high rates of publication in journals with high citation and profile," the report notes.

Recommendations state "NPI needs to look carefully at its organizational structure. Individual research groups need to have a

coherent strategy, with a four- to five-year strategic plan, and must have critical mass. They should avoid creating research groups which are too small."

Also, "research links with the University of Tromsø could be significantly strengthened in those areas in which there is a mutual research interest. The future of Atmospheric Sciences research at NPI needs careful consideration."

Many of the report's criticisms have been addressed, although some work remains, said Gunn Sissel Jaklin, NPI's communications director, in an interview with forskning.no.

"I will not comment on the assessment," she said. "We have not considered research to be bad, but we are constantly working to improve quality and we have strengthened many of our professions."

Although some of the communities are very small, all will be continue and be strengthened, she said. Other measures, such as closer cooperation with the University of Tromsø, are being implemented.

The English-language report is available at www.forskningsradet.no.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Skepticism greets plans for new antenna in Ny-Ålesund

Plans for a new geodesy antenna in Ny-Ålesund are being received skeptically, with seven of 12 replies to an environmental impact assessment expressing opposition. The current facility at the settlement is aging and a new one is proposed at Brandalpynten, which is on a promontory extending out into Kongsfjorden. The Norwegian Mapping Authority says is the only feasible location, but critics responding to it argue it will conflict with outdoor activities and set a precedent for more infrastructure outside the settlement.

Leader's departure may be the end of Sirkus Svalnardo

The Sirkus Svalnardo performance earlier this month may have been the finale, as Janne Nilsen says she is stepping down as the project's manager. Nilsen, who began the annual show in 2000 so her three children could continue performances they did in Tromsø, said things went smoothly until 2006, but obtaining funds and finding performers has become progressively more difficult since. She moved with her family to Tromsø in 2007 and said "eventually I lost awareness of what was happening there." Also, "when I first went there were young people 12- to 14-years-old that I felt I had to follow up with," she said. "Most of that group does not live there anymore."

Floating concrete seen as cost saver for new pier

Longyearbyen officials are considering a new floating large-ship pier rather than a fixed one, saying the 30 million kroner cost would be one-fourth that of a traditional dock. The pier between Bykaia and the old wharf, where poor soil conditions make a land-based facility costly, would be 85 meters long by 20 meters wide and able to accommodate ships up to 120 meters in length. Port Director Kjetil Bråten said a floating tourist pier has withstood the Arctic weather conditions for three years and the larger dock should also be viable. The dock would be scheduled for installation by the summer of 2013 if approved by the Municipal Council.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Snow. E winds to 58 km/h. High -8C (-18C wind chill), low -9C (-20C wind chill).	Snow. Variable winds to 32 km/h. High -6C (-15C wind chill), low -8C (-19C wind chill).	Snow. Variable winds to 15 km/h. High -8C (-13C wind chill), low -12C (-19C wind chill).	Snow ending. Variable winds to 15 km/h. High 11C (-18C wind chill), low -14C (-19C wind chill).
Sunrise 0:00; sunset 0:00	Sunrise 0:00; sunset 0:00	Sunrise 0:00; sunset 0:00	Sunrise 0:00; sunset 0:00
Extended forecast: Sunday, p. cloudy, -14C (-19C), -18C (-25C), light 0:00h; Monday, p. cloudy, -18C (-25C), -19C (-27C), light 0:00h; Tuesday, p. cloudy, -18C (-24C), -19C (-26C), light 0:00h; Wednesday, cloudy, -16C (-22C), -19C (-26C), light 0:00h			
Data provided by yr.no			



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Longyearbyen residents circle a just-lit Christmas tree in the town square while singing traditional holiday songs Sunday to celebrate the beginning of Advent.

Santa fails to foil festivities

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Explanations weren't exactly forthcoming.

Workers at the post office weren't sure – indeed, they don't know who Santa's outsourcing his mail collection to these days. A commenter at *Svalbardposten's* website declares "I have heard from Santa's little helpers that they were still on summer time." Except that means they'd have arrived an hour early, not late.

Finally, a real helper offered scant details.

"Santa Claus was not able to set up the mailbox by Sunday," wrote Marianne Aasen,

daily manager for Bydrift, in an e-mail. The city's infrastructure agency is responsible for collecting the letters and passing them on to Mr. Kringle.

But the mailbox was in place early this week and letters are now being carefully filed before being sent on, Aasen wrote.

Lest anyone relax completely, she also added "it has been difficult to send them on to Santa," although she didn't elaborate why.

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

E. Svalbard feedback now in English

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available in English at the governor's website (<http://www.sysselmannen.no/hoved.aspx?m=44365>). The assessments by the tourism and scientific research groups share some common concerns about excessive restrictions, but also differ widely in assessing general knowledge about the area and its potential for future activities.

The two large nature reserves on East Svalbard were set up by Royal Decree in 1973. The management plan covers 51 percent of Svalbard's land and sea area on the east side. Environmental preservation, cultural heritage and future anticipated commercial use are factors in the proposal.

A draft released earlier this year greatly restricts access to the area, resulting in widespread concerns being expressed by various interests. Reviews of the proposal by the Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management and other entities are scheduled to continue into next year.

Among the major differences in the tourism and science assessments is how knowledgeable people are about the area. The tourism report states "the level of environ-

mental awareness among ship's personnel, expedition teams and tourists is exceptionally high," while the science group argues "there is a considerable lack of knowledge about the natural state of eastern Svalbard as a whole."

The high level of awareness is a key reason the tourism group is arguing against additional restrictions. It also states tourism activity is unlikely to increase significantly in the future due to limited industry interest in the low-cost small ships that can travel too an area with high potential accident and liability costs.

The science report, on the other hand, states "the eastern areas of Svalbard represent a variety of opportunities for the training of the next generation of environmental researchers." It offers a number of recommendations, including banning experimental research activities such as adding nutrients to natural areas and discharging petroleum products in order to study the effect of different strategies in connection with oil spills.

English translations of the other groups' findings are not expected to be available, according to the governor's office.

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

What's up

Nov. 30

6 p.m.: Movie: "Ola Froskesnapper"(3D), Danish animated/family, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 4

6 p.m.: Movie: "Blåfjell 2 – Jakten på get Magiske Horn" (3D), Norwegian family film, all ages. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Arme Riddere," Norwegian action/comedy, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 5

10:15 a.m.: Environmental and Economic Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

Dec. 6

7:30 p.m.: Premier: RuffRiders 7 Release Tour. Movie begins at 8 p.m. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 7

6 p.m.: Movie: "Footloose," U.S. drama/comedy/musical, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Varg Veum – I Mørket er Alle Ulver Grå," Danish/Norwegian crime/thriller, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 10

1 p.m.: Puppet show "Kaspar and Krokodillen" by Kjell Wernøe, followed at 2 p.m. by "Kaspar and Gullskatten" by Mette Wernøe. Each show is about 30 minutes. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Holiday trek from Nybyen to Trollsteinen. All forms of non-motorized transportation welcomed for the up and down tour. More details available at www.spitsbergenupanddown.no.

Dec. 11

7:30 p.m.: Concert by Leif Ove Andsnes, celebrating the 25th anniversary of the acclaimed pianist's debut. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 13

7 p.m.: Local Board meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

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:

- *Few hopes at 200-nation climate summit*
- *Scotland joins nations making Arctic claim*
- *Sweden's Arctic strategy criticized*
- *Woman tries robbery with toy penguin*