



# Under fire, lights stay on

City: Emergency measures '100 percent successful' after blaze halts main power plant for three days

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

The fire broke out in the worst possible place, caused damage to an extent still not known and forced workers to continuously replenish diesel supplies at a far less capable backup facility.

Yet for nearly all of Longyearbyen, the lights never flickered for a second.

The city's main power plant resumed nor-

**Burning need:** Higher fire department lift added to city's final budget for 2013

Page 4

mal operation Sunday night after a fire broke out in the ceiling Friday morning. Meanwhile, electricity was provided by the diesel-powered backup facility and Marianne Aasen, Bydrift's

chief administrator, said the city's emergency measures were "100 percent successful."

"The work that was done was 100 percent successful in all of what we have practiced in connection with emergency situations," the head of the city's infrastructure agency wrote in an e-mail. "However, we will always evaluate what we do and look for possible improvements."

See **POWER**, page 4

## Welcoming alien species for the holidays



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Families shop for Christmas trees Saturday outside of Svalbardbutikken. Sales of the saplings that are alien to Svalbard were brisk during the few hours they were being sold Friday and Saturday. Meanwhile, stubby artificial shrubbery has been available inside the store at discounts for weeks.

# 'Tis not so merry to see red

Svalbard feels some of the worst heat in Arctic Report Card full of records due to climate change

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

Red and green might be the colors of the season, but there's more of them in this year's record-breaking Arctic Report Card than locals may find cheery.

A map of temperatures has some of its brightest red bands passing over Svalbard, indicating readings were among the highest above normal in the north during a 12-month period ending in September. The report by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

See **NORTH**, page 3

## Inside

- Ice chills signals; signals catch fire** Page 2
- Headlines from Svalbardposten**
  - Contract for better rescue helicopters awarded
  - Low coal prices dampen Store Norske's mood
  - Court upholds fines for illegal catch by trawler
- Weather forecast** Page 3
- Events calendar** Page 4

## E-book? Get a clue, Sherlock

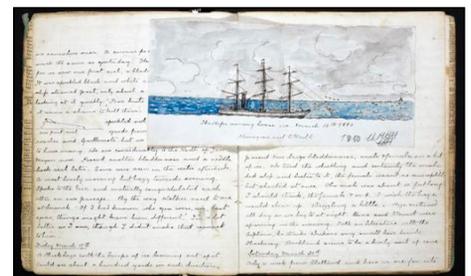
Review: Arthur Conan Doyle's diary on Arctic whaling a pretty picture – in the paper edition

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

It's the Mystery of the Missing Images. But even Sherlock Holmes might agree true justice is allowing the case to go unsolved.

A newly published diary by famed detective author Arthur Conan Doyle about his harsh adventures as an Arctic whaler during the late 1800s is full of wit, gristly tales and

See **DIARY**, page 3



UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

A replica of Arthur Conan Doyle's diary in the Arctic shows his sketch of the whaling ship he worked on during the late 1800s.

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

### Editor

Mark Sabbatini

### Copy Editor

Brennan Purtzer

### Principal of principles

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

*Icepeople* is published weekly (or thereabouts) on Tuesdays (or thereabouts), with printed copies available free on a limited basis in Longyearbyen. Additional printed copies are available locally and by mail upon request. Charges are on an "at cost" basis.

## Copyright stuff

Original contents of this publication can be reproduced for non-commercial purposes free of charge if *Icepeople* is credited as the source. The original writers, photographers and other contributors retain their rights to all published works.

## 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.

## Can you hoar me now?



TELENOR SVALBARD



TELENOR SVALBARD

Ice encrusts and bends a Telenor Svalbard communications antenna, left, at the company's station on Skolten mountain in Adventdalen, pictured above. Winter storms with high winds crippled the antenna beyond the point of a quick fix, said Harald Fagermoen, the company's administrative director, in an interview with *Svalbardposten*. The result is slightly reduced cellular phone coverage east of Longyearbyen and in inland Adventdalen, although NetCom's coverage is not affected. The antenna also has equipment used by Avinor, but the damage is not disrupting flight navigation readings. Fagermoen said Telenor is receiving new equipment that will be set up to provide a temporary solution.

## Icesheet

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

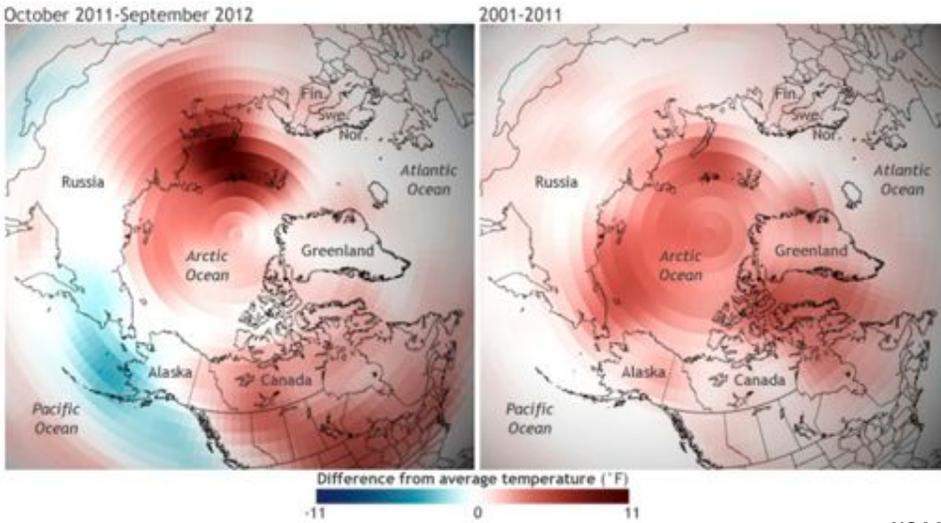
We can think of a few one-liners to describe Kevin Cooley (i.e. he's in constant need of help), but his viewfinder of the world is certainly an enlightening one. **The photographer from Los Angeles captured Svalbard and other less cool places on film (yes, film) in hues provided by military flares.** The resulting exhibit, "Take Refuge," hit the gallery circuit earlier this year and is now online at his website ([www.kevincooley.net/take-refuge](http://www.kevincooley.net/take-refuge)). "Referencing the Romantic Movement in art and literature, the work attests to both the fear and longing nature inspires," Cooley said. OK, that sorta went over our heads, but the images he shot while here on an Arctic Circle Expeditionary Residency last fall are great at portraying the sci-fi/fantasy image that authors, moviemakers and video game programmers love to bestow on us ... While we're on myths, **we're not entirely buying into a headline this week declaring "Relax: Santa unaffected by sea ice loss."** Discovery Channel muckraker Larry O'Hanlon claims Kris Kringle has moved from the endangered ice at the North Pole. "We are now located in northern Greenland, on solid ground," said Ilbereth, Santa's head spokeself. "The new facility has been named North Pole Station in order to avoid confusing children or give Hollywood producers an excuse to remake all of the classic holiday movies." Not to question your journalism creds, Larry (OK, we are), but if you'd done any research you'd known Santa's been running



KEVIN COOLEY

**Burning man:** If you're lighting flares for an art project, what do you do when you need help?

a land-based operation here out of Mine 2B as far back as locals can remember ... Then again, it seems like commonfolk aren't doing nearly as much research about Svalbard as they used to. **Google just published its most popular search words and phrases for 2012, and a check using their "Trends" feature reveals "Svalbard" had the lowest number of queries in many years.** Things like the seed vault and polar bear attacks generated curiosity among webheads in recent years, but the peak so far this year came in September and was seemingly generated by a Norwegian newspaper article wondering if Svalbard's tourism might vanish "without a trace." A sudden spike this month that might surpass that peak doesn't have a declared reason, but we're guessing it might have something to do with the camera at our local observatory that's supposed to capture all of the Northern Lights in the sky at once.



NOAA  
An overhead map compares average temperatures during the past year, at left, and past decade with historical averages. Svalbard felt some of the worst heat, including a winter that was unusually warm.

## Arctic report card full of failures

**NORTH, from page 1**

also declares the Arctic reached records lows for snow and ice extent, highs for permafrost temperatures, and lengths for growing season.

In addition to plenty of Grinch-like gloom for those concerned about global warming, the report card contains chilling details about contrasting extreme weather resulting from climate change, including deadly winter storms in Europe brought by frigid conditions in Svalbard.

Wild fluctuations in traditional sea life, including "massive phytoplankton blooms" below summer ice and brown algae replacing anemones on the sea floor, are highlighted. The findings in the atmosphere aren't any better.

"During February, total ozone was more

than 30 percent below the baseline value at Svalbard," the report notes. Monthly averages of 10 percent or more were common in the Arctic.

The highest above-normal temperatures occurred just east of Svalbard, where readings were up to 11 degrees Celsius above average, with the archipelago close enough to still be far warmer than most of the Arctic. Temperatures in the region during the past year were also drastically higher than the previous decade, which was modestly above the historical average.

The report, plus videos and other visuals, is available at [www.arctic.noaa.gov/reportcard](http://www.arctic.noaa.gov/reportcard).

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

## 'Sherlock' author's real-life a chiller

**DIARY, from page 1**

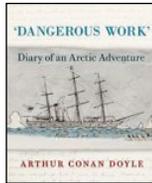
sketches depicting life on the seas between Svalbard and Greenland. But only if you're holding a good old-fashioned book made of paper – y'know, what they had to use back then – not those new-fangled e-book things.

The electronic version of "Dangerous Work: Diary of an Arctic Adventure," written when Doyle was 20, contains only the text. It's still a pleasure to read his descriptions of polar bears ("they are cowardly brutes unless in a corner.") and camaraderie ("I fell into the Arctic Ocean three times today, but luckily someone was always near to pull me out"). But it's the difference between listening to "The

Nutcracker" and seeing it live.

The text in the "real" book is a facsimile of Doyle's handwriting which, while harder to read, makes it feel like a real diary. His numerous sketches add a depth and character mere words can't capture. One shows him and a dog at "a most extraordinary natural snow house, about 12 feet high, shaped like a beehive with a door and a fine room inside in which I sat. Traveled a considerable distance, and would have gone to the Pole, but my matches ran short and I couldn't get a smoke." The text may suggest a typical igloo, but the image differs.

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



## HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

### New helicopters will boost Svalbard's rescue capabilities

A contract has been awarded that will boost Svalbard's rescue capabilities in 2014 by putting two new Super Puma helicopters into service. "This means that we strengthen the emergency preparedness on Svalbard," said Grete Faremo, Norway's Minister of Justice, in a prepared statement. "We want to secure Norway's abilities to take responsibility for rescue in our own and adjacent areas." The helicopters provided by Lufttransport will feature better communications and safety equipment, and be able to pick up 18 people within a radius of 120 nautical miles. Svalbard now has one large and one medium-size helicopter.

### 'Good season' still not up to recent years for Store Norske

Store Norske had a "good season" by earning nearly 700 million kroner from 1.25 million tons of coal shipped from Svea this year, but the company isn't happy about the market price of 85 to 95 dollars per ton. "The way it looks as of today I do not believe that coal prices will change next year," said Aleksander Askeland, sales and marketing director for the company. A total of 20 shiploads of coal departed from Svea between Aug. 14 and Nov. 20. The company received complaints about three having too high a humidity content, which Askeland said resulted from a wet fall and period where stored coal wasn't sufficiently drained of water. An accident at the loading facility was also a factor in a lower amount of shipped coal than in recent years.

### Court upholds fines against ship catching too many fish

An Icelandic trawler captain and a German company must pay a total of 58,000 kroner in fines for catching too much haddock in the fisheries protection zone around Svalbard, according to a Nord-Troms District Court ruling. Norwegian Coast Guard inspectors detained the German trawler *Kiel* near Hopen on Sept. 4 for the illegal catch. The company, Deutsche Fischfang-Union, challenged the resulting 55,000-kroner fine, arguing Norway discriminates against foreign vessels and the protection zone is contrary to the Svalbard Treaty.

## Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy. SE winds to 25 km/h. High -7C (-13C wind chill), low -11C (-17C wind chill).	Cloudy. SE winds to 25 km/h. High -8C (-12C wind chill), low -11C (-16C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. SE winds to 22 km/h. High -7C (-11C wind chill), low -10C (-15C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. S winds to 18 km/h. High -7C (-11C wind chill), low -10C (-15C wind chill).
24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness
<b>Extended forecast:</b> Sunday, cloudy, -5C (-11C), -10C (-15C), light 0:00h; Monday, cloudy, -6C (-11C), -9C (-17C), light 0:00h; Tuesday, cloudy, -3C (-10C), -8C (-16C), light 0:00h; Wednesday, snow, -2C (-8C), -9C (-16C), light 0:00h			

Data provided by storm.no



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Marianne Aasen, chief administrator for Bydrift, briefs Longyearbyen's municipal council today about the response to a fire Friday at the city's main power plant and the inability to initially reach the roof where it was burning because the fire department's truck lift was too short. The council unanimously approved a new lift as a last-minute addition to next year's budget, which was finalized at the meeting.

## For many, fire's impact unseen

**POWER, from page 1**

The cause of the fire, which broke out at about 6 a.m., is still unofficially undetermined, Aasen wrote. However, firefighters said it appears a safety valve that releases excess generator steam failed to close properly, causing heat to build up. That resulted in water from melting snow to leak onto the plant's numerous electrical components, igniting the fire and causing damage to an extent still being assessed.

Firefighters arrived within minutes, with 19 of the department's 24 members responding, but their efforts to extinguish the flames were hampered by a crane that was too short to reach the roof and the difficulty of accessing the sloping metallic surface after a lift was borrowed from LNS Spitsbergen.

"When working with wood, you can use the chainsaw," Fire Chief Geir Hekne told *Svalbardposten*. "This additional work was physically demanding because crews had to cut

through steel structures with an ax."

Other agencies also assisted, with Avinor providing a water cannon and crew members aboard the *KV Svalbard* using floodlights to illuminate the roof. No firefighters or other personnel were injured.

The fire escaped the notice of some residents during the weekend as power went uninterrupted, even during the switch to the backup facility. That plant had experienced previous failures, but was renovated this summer.

But the impact was pronounced for some, since the reserve facility produces less power.

"The reserve plant produces electricity to supply the city and the airport as the first priority," Aasen wrote, "Mine 7 and Eiskat will not be in production. We 'put out' the line in Adventdalen when we are running on reserves."

The city was also unable to provide heat for homes in Skjæringa.

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

## New fire lift a late addition to budget

*Municipal council OKs upgrade despite tight funds after existing gear slows efforts at power plant*

**By MARK SABBATINI  
Editor**

The flames at the power plant lit a fire under Longyearbyen's municipal council during their meeting today to finalize the budget for 2013. They unanimously approved a higher lift for the fire department to replace one that proved too short to reach the plant's ceiling.

The lift, expected to cost about 4.5 million kroner, was originally scheduled for purchase in 2014. But Fire Chief Geir Hekne, who is also the lead Conservative Party member of the council, said speeding up the purchase should be a priority even though the city is facing financial hardships.

"This is about saving lives," he said.

Firefighters had to borrow a crane from LNS Spitsbergen and equip it with a basket to help stop the fire that ignited in the power plant's ceiling Friday.

The remainder of the budget for 2013 was approved essentially as written in the draft approved last month by the Administration Committee.

The city, which requested a 188.46 million kroner allocation from the Norwegian government, received 146.03 million. That's an increase from the 127.5 million allocated for 2012, but nearly all of the extra is for mandatory upgrades to Longyearbyen's power plant.

The city plans to deal with the shortfall in its request largely by delaying maintenance to infrastructure such as bridges.

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

## What's up

### Dec. 12

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

6 p.m.: Movie: "The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey" (3D), New Zealand/U.S. adventure/fantasy, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

### Dec. 13

11 a.m.: St. Lucy's Day celebration for youths. Longyearbyen Library.

### Dec. 14

7 p.m.: Theater performance: "Children of Abraham" featuring Svein Tindberg and members of Det Norske Teatret. Kulturhuset.

### Dec. 16

5 p.m.: Holiday concert by Polargospel, Kirke Trio, Longyearbyen Storband and other local musicians. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey," New Zealand/U.S. adventure/fantasy, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

9 p.m.: Movie: "The Door," German thriller, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

### Dec. 17

10 a.m.: Christmas service for young children. Svalbard Church.

7 p.m.: Trivia quiz. Kulturhuset cafe.

### Dec. 19

6 p.m.: Movie: "Reisen til Julestjernen," Norwegian family/adventure, all ages. Kulturhuset.

### Dec. 20

8:30 a.m.: Christmas Mass for primary school students. Svalbard Church.

10 a.m.: Christmas service for secondary school students. Svalbard Church.

### Dec. 22

1 p.m.: Movie: "Lotte Ja Kuukivi Saladus," Estonian children's animated film dubbed in Norwegian, no age limit specified. Sneak preview screening. Kulturhuset.

## 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:

- *Vague deal at Doha climate summit*
- *Greenland OKs importing cheap miners*
- *Idea: Fight sea ice loss by refreezing it*
- *36% of U.S.: Warming sign of 'end times'*