



Trees and angels? Must be a time of miracles



Carlarne Ollinse, 5, above left, and Sander Birkeland, 5, help pick Christmas trees Dec. 11 in front of Svalbardbutikken.

The store brought 180 Evergreen Conifer trees from Copenhagen, with a few remaining early this week. At right, local youths gather for stories and other St. Lucy's Day activities Dec. 13 at the Longyearbyen Library.



Words, not war in Arctic

International disputes likely to be solved through diplomacy, not military action, study says

Diplomacy is "a more likely and rational way" than military action for resolving future disputes about borders and natural resources in the Arctic, according to two researchers studying Norwegian-Russian relations in Svalbard and the Barents Sea.

They may have trouble convincing nations with the disputes, if recent international gatherings and actions are any indication.

Cooperation: Russia, Norway join for study of ecosystem in Barents Sea.

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Several countries are getting more aggressive about staking claims to the Arctic as global warming opens access to what may be a quarter of the world's untapped oil, commercial shipping routes and other industries. But the study by the Fridtjof Nansen Institute states the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea contains clauses for ice-covered waters and offer little legal maneuvering room for military options.

"Contrary to the general picture drawn by the media and some commentators over the last couple of years, the Arctic region

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An icy presence among hot tempers

Svalbard issues, ice sculpture get some notice at climate summit

Protesters were arrested by the hundreds, groups of nations were on the verge of walking out and the world is still debating if the Copenhagen climate summit was a success or debacle.

But at least most people seemed to agree the ice bear from Longyearbyen looked pretty cool. And leaders including Barack Obama and Al Gore drew attention to some key issues facing the Norwegian Arctic.

The two-week summit of 192 nations, which ended Friday, teetered on the verge of **See SUMMIT, page 3**



Olaf Storø works on a polar bear sculpture of ice in Longyearbyen. His work was featured at this month's climate summit in Copenhagen.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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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.



Norwegian Minister of Agriculture and Food Lars Peder Brekk, left and Global Crop Diversity Trust Executive Director Cary Fowler pose inside the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, which received another 50,000 seeds adapted for dry climates this month. Photo by Kjell Werner/ANB.

Local news in brief

Vault gets 50,000-seed deposit for dry regions

A shipment of 50,000 seeds adapted for dry regions arrived at the Svalbard Global Seed Vault at about the same time world leaders were gathering at the Copenhagen climate summit earlier this month.

The seeds were placed in the vault Dec. 13, bringing the total collection to more than 430,000 since the facility opened in February of 2008. Prominent among the most recent samples is sorghum, dubbed a "camel among crops" for its wide adaptability and resistance to drought.

"Since the climate conditions change so rapidly, it is extremely important to ensure the genetic diversity of all the cultural plants of the world," Norwegian Minister of Agriculture and Food Lars Peder Brekk said in a prepared statement.

Depositors include two agricultural research centers working with adaptation of plants to dryer areas. Roland von Bothmer, professor of genetics and plant-breeding at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, said genetic diversity is necessary for crops that can thrive in the "dramatically different conditions expected in the future."

Flu shots remain after being offered to all

More than 200 vaccinations for H1N1 flu remained available at Longyearbyen Hospital on Thursday, the last of four days when shots were made available to all Svalbard residents.

Aksel Bilicz, a supervising nurse at the hospital, said those wanting shots for the disease, also known as swine flu, can contact the hospital for an appointment.

The most recent shipment of 1,500 doses came after a limited number of vaccines were offered during the past couple of months to high-risk patients and those living in Barentsburg. Several cases of swine flu have been confirmed in Svalbard and dozens reported symptoms without seeking treatment, but Bilicz said it does not appear the disease is spreading.

Officials originally stated patients should receive a second vaccination within a few weeks after the first one, but Bilicz said that now does not appear necessary.

Consumer prices rise 2.7 percent during 2009

Consumer prices in Svalbard rose 2.7 percent as of October compared to a year ago, according to Statistics Norway.

The largest increase was electricity, up 18.5 percent from a year ago. District heating costs rose 4.2 percent. Paid and estimated housing costs also outpaced inflation at 4.6 percent and 5.7 percent, respectively.

Eating in restaurants was 5.9 percent more expensive than a year ago, alcohol and tobacco prices rose 5.8 percent, food and other beverages rose 4 percent, and hotel prices rose 4 percent.

Items declining in price included airplane tickets, down 4.3 percent. Postal and telecommunications services were also less expensive.

Happy holidays; see you in 2010

The next issue of *Icepeople* is scheduled to be published Jan. 5 and, yes, one of our New Year's resolutions is to actually appear on Tuesdays now that we have a bit of time to catch up. Speaking of which, for those wondering about the lack of full stories at our site, they're on their way as well. We've been dealing with some illness and other mishaps that still aren't as bad as being stuck at the mall or airport this time of year.



Trude, above, a half-ton polar bear sculpture of ice by Olaf Storø of Longyearbyen, rests outside a cathedral in Copenhagen during the climate summit there earlier this month. At right, a more graphic ice bear by English sculptor Mark Coreth melts in London's Trafalgar Square during the summit. Storø's was expected to survive the summit largely intact, with only the skeleton of Coreth's remaining.



HEADLINES STOLEN FROM
SVALBARDPOSTEN
VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

No solution yet for lack of air ambulance services

A solution remains elusive for Svalbard's inadequate air ambulance service, according to officials who this summer said longer-than-usual delays were forcing some patients to wait up to a day for evacuation to Tromsø. New European Union rules limit flight crews to 12 hours of a work per day, causing a shortage of available personnel during some requests for help. The Svalbard governor's office asked the Norwegian Justice Department to investigate and Roger Ingebrigtsen, state secretary of health care services, said the process is ongoing. "The ministry would like to get this in place as soon as possible," he said. Options include improving Svalbard's ambulatory capability with a new plane or medical upgrades to an existing government aircraft.

Youths warm to new outdoor ice rink made by volunteers

A new outdoor ice rink below Longyearbyen School is proving popular with youths after temperatures finally dropped low enough for water sprayed by the Longyearbyen Fire Department to freeze properly. The rink, including a small shelter, was set up this fall by Stig Gaustad and other local volunteers. Tor Punsvik, a father of two children at the rink, said holiday activities including fires and barbecues are planned.

Ny-Ålesund loses telephone, internet connections

Ny-Ålesund has been without telephone and internet connections since Friday due to the failure of a power unit at Telenor's station on Kongsvegpasset. Poor weather has made flying a helicopter to the station impossible, leaving a satellite phone as the only means of communication with the outside world. Officials said there is no danger to residents' life or health, but is problematic for scientists unable to send data and people trying to contact family members for the holidays.

Some winners, even if summit falls short

SUMMIT, from page 1

collapse several times before an accord was reached seeking to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius, or 3.6 Fahrenheit. It also pledges \$100 billion dollars annually to poor nations by the end of next decade for climate-related remedies. But little in the pact is binding and nations are accusing each other of causing what a top European Union official called a "great failure."

Some participants are calling the summit an important step, even if much remains to be done. If making a statement drawing widespread attention to climate issues was indeed a victory, then Longyearbyen sculptor Olaf Storø's silent offering emerged as a bigger winner than many of the protesters and speakers clamoring loudly for attention.

His half-ton polar bear named Trude, carved from Svalbard ice and displayed in

front of a Copenhagen cathedral, was admired by masses ranging from children to Bishop Desmond Tuto.

"It is easy for people to understand climate change when they see a 500-kilogram bear slowly melt and disappear," Storø told the Swiss newspaper *Ecumenical News International*.

The attention on issues directly affecting Svalbard went well beyond symbolic during the actual summit meetings.

Gore, a former U.S. vice president and Nobel Prize winner for his climate awareness efforts, earned global headlines last Monday for citing a northern Norway study suggesting "a 75 percent chance the entire polar ice cap will melt in summer within the next five to seven years."

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

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Very windy, some snow. E winds gusting past 80 km/h. High -7C (-22C wind chill), low -11C (-22C wind chill).	Low clouds. ENE winds at 19 km/h. High -11C (-18C wind chill), low -16C (-19C wind chill).	Partly cloudy, a passing flurry. NW winds at 6 km/h. High -12C (-13C wind chill), low -12C (-14C wind chill).	Cloudy. NNE winds at 6 km/h. High -12C (-13C wind chill), low -14C (-15C wind chill).
Extended forecast: Sunday, overcast with a flurry, -13C (-16C), -16C (-26C); Monday, cloudy with a flurry, -14C (-26C), -14C (-26C); Tuesday, partly cloudy, -11C (-23C), -14C (-25C); Wednesday, cloudy, -13C (-24C), -17C (-27C).			

Data provided by AccuWeather.com



This map detailing pending law of the sea issues in the Barents Sea is part of a study by Øystein Jensen and Svein Vigeland Røttem declaring diplomacy, not military action, is the likely solution.

Clarity of law for Arctic areas questioned

DISPUTES, from page 1

does not suffer under a state of virtual anarchy," said Øystein Jensen, a laws of the sea expert and co-author of the study, in a prepared statement Dec. 17. "The era when states could claim rights to territory and resources by simply planting their flag is long gone."

Jensen's comment refers to a 2007 Russian mini-sub expedition where participants planted a flag into the seabed below the North Pole point, raising concerns in Arctic capitals and sparking widespread media reports about an "Arctic race for territory and resources." Russia, among other actions, also announced this year the Arctic will become its "main resource base" for national security operations by 2020.

Canada and the United States have announced plans for increasing Arctic military operations as well, with Denmark and Greenland also disputing their rights.

The U.N. law referenced in the FNI study is anything but clear, according to military, diplomatic and shipping experts meeting in November at the first Halifax International Security Forum.

Russia, Norway join to study Barents Sea

Ecosystem generally healthy, but concerns about pollution and climate change raised

The Barents Sea ecosystem is relatively clean and illegal fishing greatly reduced, but numerous threats to wildlife exist from problems such as pollution and global warming, according to a joint Russian-Norwegian study.

The study, released this month, states the area faces a critical period as several oil fields are scheduled to start up during the next six years and fishing activity is expected to remain

"There are unresolved and overlapping territorial claims," a *New York Times* article about the conference notes. "There is a dispute between the North Americans about whether an operational Northwest Passage, joining the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, is a Canadian or an international waterway. And there is concern that a three-year-long Russian mapping mission of the Arctic seabed will have an unnecessary military escort."

The Law of the Sea is also riddled with problems, experts at the convention and elsewhere have noted. *Newsweek*, reporting from the Copenhagen climate summit, states the law lacks specifics for fending off militarization and "offers a hazy view of how the land is divided up, relying on geologic data not easily interpreted. Continental shelves usually indicate the edges of coastal nations, but even the term 'edge' is subject to sliding definitions." Also, the United States never ratified the U.N. convention's work and some say it fails to address issues such as climate change.

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

high. More stringent environmental monitoring and management between the two countries is called essential due to "potential major and irreversible changes of the ecosystem."

Pollutants such as PCBs are a particular threat to species high in the food chain including polar bears and sea birds, according to the study. Ocean acidification from anthropogenic emissions of CO₂ is another concern. Also, warming may be causing reproductive difficulties among marine mammals.

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

What's up

Dec. 24

2 p.m. and 4 p.m.: Christmas Eve liturgies. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 25

Noon: Christmas Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 26

Noon: Romjul march, starting at Svalbardhallen.

Dec. 27

No movies due to Christmas holiday.

Jan 3

5 p.m.: Movie: "2012," U.S. action/adventure, ages 11 and up. Huset.

8 p.m.: Movie, "The Twilight Saga – New Moon," U.S. suspense/thriller, ages 11 and up. Huset.

Jan 6

First day of school after Christmas holiday.

Jan. 10

8 p.m.: Movie: "Quiet Chaos," Italian drama, ages 11 and up. Huset.

Jan. 17

6 p.m.: Movie: "A Christmas Carol," U.S. drama/fantasy, ages 11 and up. Huset.

8 p.m.: Movie "Looking for Eric," Belgian/British/French comedy, ages 11 and up. Huset.

Jan 19

8 p.m.: Svalbard seminar, topic to be announced. Møysalen research center. First in a series involving the Norwegian Polar Institute.

Jan 21

8 p.m.: Svalbard seminar, topic to be announced. Møysalen research center.

Jan. 24

8 p.m.: Movie: "Faustas Perler," Peruvian drama, all ages. Huset.

Jan 26

8 p.m.: Svalbard seminar, topic to be announced. Møysalen research center.

What's online

[Icepeople.net](http://www.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:

- *Thin ice has polar bears eating offspring*
- *Building up Longyearbyen for 20 years*
- *Easy and hard vacations to the N. Pole*
- *Grading Earth's northernmost judo club*