Svalbard’s surreal year of COVID-19

By MARK SABBATINI

Still zero cases, first day of mandatory masks and an epidemic of costs on anniversary of pandemic

Of all the staggering facts and statistics for Svalbard since COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic exactly one year ago today, one stands out as the most significant: There are still no reported cases of the virus, making the archipelago one of only six* “countries” as classified by the World Health Organization able to make that claim.

(The asterisk is because North Korea and Turkmenistan have reported no cases, but those claims have almost universally been deemed false by international health and policy organizations.)

That single fact, of course, ties in to virtually all other local effects of the pandemic – most notably Svalbard suffering the worst economic hardships of any municipality in Norway due to entry and other restrictions often far more strict than the nationwide standard.

See PANDEMIC, page 8
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 matters.

Nuclear winter

No, Svalbard hasn't been hit by Russian ballistic missiles or U.S. B1 bombers despite their best efforts (see below), but locals on a weekend jaunt to a cabin after a huge wind/snow storm encountered some mushrooming mounds to muse on. Another such storm is coming this week.

Lest anyone be lulled into thinking Svalbard is an isolated “bubble” from the political zaniness making headlines across the globe we’ve gotten a healthy dose during the past week due to the desires of both locals and hostile foreign countries to Make The North Great Again with our (increasingly less) frozen group of islands as Ground Zero. The Trumpian slogan, of course, belongs to the brainwashing brains at Nordting which, after lighting up our nights these past months with two giant neon signs trumpeting those words, put on a show last week that was a mix of political rally, music/dance performance by impressionable kids and revival tent meeting (“Praise the Nord!”).

The political stuff indeed was great, at least in terms being a reminder why we’ve always said Svalbard is a hardcore conservative haven despite the myths of this place being a socialist (we’re exempt from all that mainland welfare and its taxes) uber-greene (only coal mine and power plant in Norway) wasteland. Among the resolutions passed by the COVID-limited size crowd (but we’re sure* it represents the overall population’s thinking): succession so Svalbard is self-governing and reopening the Svea coal mine. Still, right-wingers will have to “unify” with the left by accepting locals don’t want to legalize hunting polar bears and favor turning all outdoor street/other lights off one night a month during the dark season. There’s also an argument locals favor joining the “renaming” craze as they voted in favor of replacing Longyearbyen’s numbered street names (which we can objectively report is an utterly confusing mess) with “real” names like Ibsjørntråkket, Svalbardreinstien and Gru-mantsvingen (on second thought, we have no hope of remembering all those the next time we need directions or to mail something). Finally, on the most controversial item, apparently the vote was split on taking down those neon signs.
Fire department calls hit 8-year low due to COVID-19

The 135 fire-related callouts by the Longyearbyen Fire Department in 2020 was the fewest since 2012, due largely to a drastically lower number of visitors after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in March, according to Chief Jan Olav Sætre. Of those, 79 were classified as unnecessary due to merely being smoke or fumes from cooking, or excessive steam that can trigger alarms. There were also 30 false fire alarms. Of the 13 structure fires, four were the “dry cooking” type – where often-intoxicated people fell asleep while food was on the stove or in an oven. The department also responded to 87 ambulance assignments.

22 individual foreigners use ‘go-home’ COVID-19 grants

A total of 22 foreign residents of Longyearbyen from eight countries received 285,000 kroner in cumulative grants to return to their homelands last fall due to the devastating long-term economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Longyearbyen’s municipal government. No families received grants, because of the strong daycare/education offerings available and the requirement the entire family return home. Of the funds, 267,658 kroner was used for airline tickets and 17,600 for other travel expenses. Thais and Filipinos were the largest group of grant recipients with 14, with others returning to various countries South America and one to Canada.

Mine 7’s end: 2028

Last Norwegian coal mine to shut when new power plant operating

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

The “cornerstone” of Longyearbyen’s 115-year existence is set to reach its final end after a years-long phaseout, as Mine 7 is scheduled to cease operations in 2028 and be dismantled during the next two years, Svalbardposten reported earlier this month.

Store Norske’s board of directors approved the closure to coincide with when Longyearbyen’s coal-fired power plant is scheduled to be fully replaced by a new facility – likely natural gas or wood pellets – now in the evaluation stage, the newspaper reported.

The dismantling of the mine and all related infrastructure will be similar to the work being done at the larger mines at Svea and Lunckefjell on the order of Norway’s government, which opted to cease operations after they suffered record losses that nearly bankrupted the company beginning in late 2014.

A new Longyearbyen power plant might be operable in as soon as two years, but the plan is to phase in the new facility in stages.

About 50 people are employed in Mine 7 operations, which as recently as last year were projected to last up to another decade since coal from the mine is sold to Europe as well as providing local power.

The 100 percent state-owned company – which also has operations in property management, tourism and logistics – has stated it plans to transition its mining operations to more environmentally friendly sources of energy, and is already utilizing solar and other alternative forms for small-scale and pilot projects.

Coal mining, which resulted in the birth of Longyearbyen in 1906, won’t cease entirely in Svalbard. The Russian settlement of Barentsburg is continuing its state-owned operations in its mine and has indicated it will continue to do so until it is tapped out.

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

Frisbee golf course near school expected this spring

A frisbee golf course between the outdoor ice rink and south end of Longyearbyen School is being set up and expected to open this spring, the newspaper reported.

The nine “hole” course, which received 88,000 kroner in donations from SpareBank1 and SvalSat, will be open to the public, once the relocatable baskets are set.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

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Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -14C (-23C), -15C (-25C), light 12:49h; Monday, p. cloudy, -15C (-24C), -16C (-25C), light 13:04h; Tuesday, cloudy, -17C (-25C), -17C (-26C), light 13:19h; Wednesday, cloudy, -16C (-24C), -17C (-25C), light 13:35h

Data provided by yr.no
A proposed "solar-powered lunar ark" to store samples of every form of life on Earth is depicted from a surface viewpoint with a temporary human staff.

DOOMSDAY ON MOON?

'Solar-powered lunar ark' proposes storing 6.7M species in underground lava tubes staffed by robots

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

It seems Svalbard’s “Doomsday Vault” isn’t fit after all to be the “new Noah’s Ark” that will be the “ultimate safeguard” for the world’s food supply in the event of Armageddon – a mere and unlucky 13 years after opening. Things are so dire we need a new “global insurance policy” on the moon, built underground in a series of lava tubes and staffed by robots.

That’s the thinking of students and instructors at the University of Arizona who are proposing a “solar-powered lunar ark” to “store cryogenically frozen seed, spore, sperm and egg samples from 6.7 million Earth species.”

Presenting the project at the IEEE Aerospace Conference last weekend, they argued Earth’s natural history – which has involved several mass extinction events – combined with the existential threats posed by climate change means “As humans, we had a close call about 75,000 years ago with the Toba supervolcanic eruption, which caused a 1,000-year cooling period and, according to some, aligns with an estimated drop in human diversity,” said Jekan Thanga, a professor of aerospace and mechanical engineering, who presented the project (watch video of presentation). “Because human civilization has such a large footprint, if it were to collapse, that could have a negative cascading effect on the rest of the planet.”

Instead of trying to develop a base for humans, “miniature flying and hopping robots called SphereX enter a lava tube in teams. There, they would collect samples of regolith, or dust and loose rock, and gather information about the layout, temperature and makeup of the lava tubes. This information could inform the construction of the lunar base.”

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.
Keua displays his characteristic scowl on his scarred face as a photographer captures the famous feline in front of residential buildings in Barentsburg.

FAREWELL ‘FOX’

Keua, a mythological cat in Svalbard despite 1992 ban, dies after a long celebrity life in Barentsburg

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

One of Svalbard’s most loved and yet battle-scarred longtime residents, whose too-good-to-be-true mythological existence made him world famous, has departed for the happy bird-hunting grounds in the sky.

Кеша (“Kesha” in non-Cyrillic letters), a legendary occupant of the Russian settlement of Barentsburg – who contrary to “common knowledge” was not the only cat in the archipelago nor officially classified as an Arctic fox to prevent his exile due to a 1992 ban on felines – died on Jan. 20 at roughly the age of 14, according to human residents there.

“Кеша was more than a cat to us – he was a part of Barentsburg,” Ivan Velichenko, a tourism manager for the settlement, wrote in an online interview. “His death made a lot of citizens very sad because mostly all of us have met Кеша many times and took care of him. Now the most common places where you could meet Кеша (the canteen or near the Culture House) look empty without him.

Now we are closely working on a tribute to Кеша. So he will not be forgotten. There were many stories with Kesha – he has a long and interesting life.”

The best-known of those stories, however, about being the only cat in Svalbard and being classified as a fox, are local myths ranking with the likes of “more polar bears than people.” A lengthy “myths and legends” Facebook post about the ban on cats in Svalbard and Keua’s existence despite it published by settlement officials in December notes how those “facts” became common knowledge is a mystery.

“But this myth, as well as some other fun and interesting facts on the subject of cats, continues to take place, but what is true and what is fiction is difficult to understand,” the post notes. “And we share these stories with our guests during the long polar days and evenings only here in Barentsburg.”

Besides, the post added, “Кеша really is a real-world star. Some pop stars could be jealous of that number of (social media) mentions.”

Cats have been banned in Svalbard 1992 due to disease concerns and to protect the vast bird population. But there are three other cats officially registered in Barentsburg – Ryzij (“Red Head” in Russian), Mila and Nyura – who, while appearing in occasional photos, have much lower profiles.

It’s unknown how long Keua lived in Barentsburg, but Denis Yurison, a resident of the settlement, told AltaPress in December the cat was secretly brought in by Russians in the 2000s, having registered him as a polar fox. While Keua spent much of his time wandering free about the settlement, Olga Kostrova, a local tour guide, told AltaPress Keua had a permanent owner.

“He is not ownerless, but freedom-loving,” Kostrova said. “He loves to go for walks, but lives in a house with his owner. If people feed him, he’ll happily oblige.”

The critter bore plenty of scars on his face from his encounters with other native wildlife. But in his latter years he became more of a homebody with his young human family, according to Komsomolskaya Pravda.

“During the pandemic, Keua’s popularity increased even more,” the newspaper reported. “The cat living at the end of the Earth has inspired and supported people in difficult situations. They dedicated poems to Keua, wished the cat health and dreamed of meeting him.”

There’s more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.
Sun’s return just the dawn of festival

JOHANNES ERIKSSON AND MIKAEL BERGMAN

SOLFESTUKA, from page 1

“The sun is back!” came the familiar proclamation at about 12:50 p.m. by the emcee standing at the top of the old wood stairs of what was the hospital in Longyearbyen before it, and most of the rest of the town, was destroyed during World War II.

Leading up to that moment was a minute or two of an equally familiar chant “Sol! Sol! Kom igjen! Sola er min beste venn.” (Which in English translates to “Sun! Sun! Come Again! The sun is our best friend” – which is decidedly lacking in the poetic rhyme and cadence of the Norwegian chant.)

Rousing cheers greeted the first solar rays and then the full appearance of the sun above the mountains at the south end of town, which has been hiding Earth’s life-giving star from nearly the entire settlement since the official first sunrise on Feb. 16. The last time sunlight shone on most of the town was a similar interval before the last official sunset before the polar night on Oct. 25 of last year.

The celebration marked the one-year anniversary of the same gathering that was the last community event before COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. While many of the hardships of that situation remain, there was little casting a shadow over the town’s most famous annual event as the size of the crowd, sun outfits and sun songs were all in full glow. The difference, only noticeable should one step into the wrong place, is groups of youths, adult residents and visitors were assigned to designated zones to control their proximity.

(Full disclosure: It must be noted that while Norway’s government allows up to three groups of 200 people to gather for outdoor public events if they’re separated – and this reporter was notified he couldn’t be in the kids’ area where he stepped in there to take some pictures – there was plenty of maskless interacting among those gathered at less than the one meter of required distance. Also, while face masks are strongly advised and generally worn by locals at common areas like the supermarket, they were largely absent during the celebration. However, Svalbard is one of the few places in the world with no officially diagnosed COVID-19 cases.)

In addition the designated zones there were a couple of other firsts for the festival day. Two winners instead of one were declared among the students at Longyearbyen School who drew pictures for the annual official logo contest. Joanna Eriksson, a seventh-grade student, drew the “main” logo of a mask-clad sun and Mikael Bergman, a sixth-grader, drew a polar bear against a sunrise for the secondary logo seen on the back of festival t-shirts and other merchandise.

The other unique presence saw Mirko Chiappini paragliding above the crowd right as they finished their chant and the sun appeared.

Svalbard’s Best Legal Buzz

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By MARK SABBATINI  
Editor

Accusing Hurtigruten of “miserable ethical compliance,” a top manager on the cruise ship Roald Amundsen has resigned due to what he called “criminal and punishable” actions by the company regarding an outbreak of COVID-19 during two voyages to Svalbard last summer.

The accusations, made in a Facebook post a week ago Sunday and republished widely by traditional and social media soon afterward, add to the epidemic of allegations and official findings that Hurtigruten was negligent in its preventative measures for crew and guests, tried to cover up the outbreaks with actions including intimidating employees, and prioritized profits over safety.

“It was impossible for me to remain employed by an employer with such miserable ethical compliance,” wrote Kristian Sæterhaug, who stated he has worked for Hurtigruten for 15 years, but resigned in January. He called the company a “school example of an organization controlled by fear mentality.”

“Leaders who kick down (read: bully their people) are rewarded, employees who kick upwards are called in for disciplinary discussions and receive written warnings.”

Sæterhaug is the first crew member share his story publicly using his full name and criticizing Hurtigruten’s handling of the virus situation.

The outbreaks occurring during two week-long voyages between July 17-31, just after a ban on cruise ships in Svalbard was lifted, although the vessel was not allowed to dock in Longyearbyen or at other ports due to virus-related precautions. But they weren’t reported until the Roald Amundsen reached Tromsø at the end of the second journey – and even then the company allowed passengers to disembark without making contact tracing efforts.

A total of 29 passengers and 42 employees tested positive for the coronavirus, and 69 municipalities in Norway (and many others in other countries) were affected by infusion of infected travellers.

Among the many problems was no effective effort was made to quarantine about 100 Filipino crew who arrived in early July to work on the ship, Sæterhaug wrote. The outbreaks were largely prevalent among those employees.

Sæterhaug acknowledged he shamefully engaged in “deceitful” behavior by keeping silent after he and a Filipino accounting manager concerned about his colleagues asked a ship’s doctor about the outbreak the day before the second voyage reached Tromsø and was told – falsely it turned out – the cause wasn’t COVID-19.

“Me and the house economist left the infirmary, not further reassured, and looked each other in the eyes with a mutual understanding that we must do as we are told,” Sæterhaug wrote. “As a leader, this has been my most deceitful moment.”

Sæterhaug he acted surprised the next day when Tromsø officials boarded the ship and confirmed the COVID-19 infections and it seems unlikely higher-ranking officers aboard the ship were genuine when they made similar remarks.

“It’s completely unthinkable that the captain (and other ship officers) didn’t know we had Covid on board,” he wrote. “I knew it!!! When someone is fined tens of thousands for going to a party I expect the prosecutor to know their place here. What happened on the M/S Roald Amundsen last summer was criminal and punishable! I expect the rule of law to know its place here.”

Sæterhaug’s accusations are largely borne out in a report published by the Norwegian Maritime Directorate last September which concluded that the emergency preparedness was inadequate, notification routines for infection on board were not followed, and it took several days before top company managers and outside officials were informed.

Tarjei Kramviken, Hurtigruten’s communications consultant, told NRK he has read Sæterhaug’s post and takes it seriously.

“Although what our former colleague writes about the outbreak on the M/S Roald Amundsen has already been thoroughly addressed in the external investigation, Hurtigruten takes all feedback and concerns from our employees seriously,” he wrote in an e-mail.

There’s more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.
Local residents ages 56-64 receive COVID-19 vaccinations in the station at left and then wait 30 minutes in distanced chairs at the right to ensure they are not suffering from side effects. The vaccinations Wednesday evening at Svalbardhallen were the first mass treatment offered locally.

Non-virual year inflicts plenty of ill effects

PANDEMIC, from page 1

But there’s also been an inevitable resignation that the virus will reach a remote community still not ready to cope with a large outbreak. And so the one-year anniversary was remarkable in another way as it was the first day face masks for people 13 and older were required in virtually all indoor public locations and at large outdoor events, due largely to spring tourists beginning to return in significant numbers.

The anniversary also comes one day after 160 residents ages 56-64 signed up for the first mass vaccination in Svalbard, after older residents and those with the most severe health complications received dosages as vaccine shipments came in starting in early January. But even that wasn’t without concern and controversy, since it was the AstraZeneca vaccine which Denmark and several other European countries have suddenly halted the use of due reports of blood clots by several patients receiving it. (Update 6:30 p.m.: Norway announced Thursday it is halting use of the vaccine.)

Norway is reviewing the vaccine’s usage today, although the National Institute of Public Health reports no such clotting has been reported in Norway and Danish health officials have stated they have not determined the medicine caused the problem.

Several residents who received the vaccine Wednesday and found out about its use being halted elsewhere expressed strongly worded concerns about its use in online forums. But Maria Fitje Hoffmann was among those noting the number of incidents is minuscule, even if related, and the government’s urgency in vaccinating Svalbard’s population to keep it as virus-free as possible is appreciated.

“I feel very privileged to get a vaccine much earlier than the mainland, and am still grateful that I am in the process of vaccination,” she wrote in response to other readers commenting on a Svalbardposten article about the vaccine’s concerns.

The pandemic has caused and is causing its own epidemic of raging problems from Brazil’s president telling people to “stop whining” as mutations decimate the country’s health situation to individuals in the U.S. killing people who tell them to wear face masks. In Svalbard, however, there has essentially been a consensus about complying (if sometimes grudgingly) with everyday precautionary measures, which is proving to be the case with the first-ever face mask mandate.

Virtually all locals have been seen wearing masks at Svalbardbutikken, for instance, during the past several weeks even though they were only strongly recommended by officials. There were complaints, however, that tourists in particular were mixed in their observance.

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

![Svalbardøi Polar Iceberg Water](image-url)
HUNGRY TO ATTACK?

Bear killed after attack on two people working in Mohnbukta; was one-third lighter than normal for age

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

A man working on a film project was injured by a polar bear during the morning of March 2 while a scouting excursion with a co-worker to Mohnbukta in east Spitsbergen, according to The Governor of Svalbard.

“The polar bear has been shot and killed,” a statement by the governor’s declared. “The governor was notified of the incident at 9:25 a.m. today. The man who was attacked by the polar bear is slightly injured. He is now being treated at Longyearbyen Hospital.”

The man was one of two employees at Polar X, owned by local film producer Jason Roberts, and they were measuring the ice thickness in the area about 70 kilometers east of Longyearbyen when they were attacked from behind. The man attacked suffered slight head injuries and his colleague fatally shot the bear.

Roberts told Svalbardposten it is the first time in his 30 years here a polar bear has attacked an employee. He said both employees are experienced in the field, but their snowmobiles were running so they may not have heard the bear’s approach.

The bear was the six-year-old male son of a well-known female bear who has visited near Longyearbyen for many years – and he weighed just 231 kilograms, at least one-third less than a healthy bear his age, which may have been a factor in the attack, according to a Norwegian Polar Institute expert.

“It may have been aggressive because it was thin,” Jon Aars, who has done field work in Svalbard for many years, told Svalbardposten. “It is likely. The thinner they are, the greater the chance that they are dangerous. He is at an age where he is not frequently considered as a problem bear – it is mostly among the younger or the very old who have problems.”

He said he vast majority of bears ages six to 15 will weigh between 350 and 450 kilograms in April, when the spring hunting season is typically at its peak.

Sea ice conditions in east Svalbard are generally considered favorable for hunting, especially compared to the west coast where climate change has resulted in scant ice cover for the past decade. But early March is generally still too early in the year for seals that are the bears’ main prey to be birthing pups on the ice.

The injured man was transported to Longyearbyen Hospital at about 11 a.m. Officials from the governor’s office returned to the attack site that afternoon as part of their routine investigation into a polar bear encounter resulting in injuries or fatalities.

The east coast of Spitsbergen is one of the most popular travel destinations during the winter/spring because there are typically numerous bears that can be observed on the sea ice. Travellers in the area sharing their experiences on social media in recent weeks have reported seeing numerous tracks, if not always bears.

As usual, it seems that bears that attack humans are shot,” wrote Håkan Åman, a resident of Härnösand, Sweden, in a Facebook comment responding to early media coverage. “The question is whether it attacked to kill. I find it unlikely that it had that intention, since then the man would not have survived. Man should not be more careful than that when moving in the polar bear’s home territory. In addition, the company should have had more control.”

That assertion quickly drew a withering response.

“The polar bear, of course, just wanted to ‘say hello’ and play a little,” wrote Anne Lise Klungseth Sandvik, a Longyearbyen resident for more than 45 years, in a comment generating a like number of “likes.” “This is what polar bears normally do, when they attack humans. You, Håkan, of course have steeley control, as expert as you seem to be.”

The attack is the first since last Aug. 28, when Johan Jacobs Koote, 38, was killed in his tent while working as a manager at Longyearbyen Camping, with the bear shot by another person at the campsite.

Officials killed three other polar bears last year – one deliberately and one accidentally due to an unexpected problem with a tranquilizer – when the animals made repeated trips into or near Longyearbyen in January. A third bear died in September when it was tranquilized by researchers and apparently ended up with its head submerged in a pool of water.

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There’s more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.
Aside from a handful of tiny Pacific island nations, and highly dubious claims from North Korea and we're paying you 20 kroner to read this newspaper. No, we're not crazy, morons, reckless, sloppy, terrible entrepreneurs, stupid. Just dedicated to our 13-year vow that Hære Arctic remain free in every sense of the word, from the news we report to being available to everyone in the world interested in our unique world here in Svalbard. (Which is why we're tastefully begging those who can donate to keep us alive do so in any amount via the above options)

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If you have any questions please contact us at 4807 8022.
On behalf of Hære Arctic: Stay Safe.

Show consideration: Wear a facemask (correctly . . .)
A snowmobiler’s view of the approach to the sea ice crossing to a glacier near Pyramiden, which will be largely off limits this spring due to a ban on motorized vehicles in the innermost portion of the fjord housing the Russian settlement. The rest of the fjord is accessible only for “direct crossings.”

**See ya, snowmobiles**

Motor traffic banned in three popular areas to protect wildlife spring; policy widely protested by locals

By MARK SABBATINI

A ban on motorized traffic in three areas heavily populated by seals and polar bears will be in effect from March 15 to June 1, The Governor of Svalbard announced Thursday after evaluating often highly critical comments from a wide variety of local interests from tourism to university research that use the areas.

The ban applies to portions of Van Mijenfjorden, Tempelfjorden and Billefjorden, except for designated areas where those on motorized vehicles can cross the sea ice as quickly and directly as possible, Kristin Heggelund, the governor’s chief environmental advisory, said in a statement summarizing the regulations.

“We have considered all proposals received,” she said. “The areas where motorized traffic is desired are close to glacier fronts, and are the areas that are most used by ringed seals and polar bears. Opening up for motorized traffic here will not be in line with the purpose behind the temporary regulation and will not protect these species from disturbance as the purpose of the regulation is environmental protection.”

Some modifications were made to the draft proposal after it was published for comment in January and exemptions for special needs can be sought. The most significant is nearly all of Billefjorden, which provides access to Pyramiden, is classified as a limited access area, whereas the draft prohibited access except for a small strip of sea ice offering a direct crossing to Pyramiden was exempted.

“It is clarified in the regulations it is permitted with necessary safety stops,” the governor’s summary adds.

A total of 24 responses to the original proposal were received from entities including Visit Svalbard (and numerous large and small tour operators), The University Centre in Svalbard, the Longyearbyen Hunting and Fishing Association, the Polar X film production company, and the Norwegian Polar Institute.

Concerns include negative economic impacts due to activity limits, unnecessarily restricting locals who are knowledgeable and few in number compared to tourists, impairing science projects that often are intended to further the wildlife/environmental knowledge the governor bases decisions on, and possibly unintended negative consequences/hazards by restricting access to narrow areas and urging a mindset of rapid passage.

Since the ban is occurring at the peak of the spring tourism season – and is a primary factor the governor has imposed similar bans the past three years, due to people illegally venturing close enough to wildlife to disrupt their activities – the largest number of responses came from companies and individuals in that industry.

Visit Svalbard, representing 70 members including eight tour companies with regular trips in the affected areas, argued allowing access near glacier faces is an important part of excursions. It also noted it has developed an ongoing set of environmental awareness measures members must follow and there should be “differentiation of traffic between different user groups.”

Officials at UNIS and the Norwegian Polar Institute stated they will likely need to set up short-term research spots in restricted areas, acknowledging it’s acceptable if a waiver can be sought. The institute also noted its data shows short stops during crossings have not been shown as being more disruptive and it’s important safety during travel be prioritized.

“A straight line across the ice is not necessarily the best way to complete a crossing,” the statement submitted by the institute notes.
Routes should be selected from the terrain of the snow. Areas on the fast ice where frozen icebergs occur should be avoided as these are usually areas that have a concentrated occurrence of throwing cavities for ringed seals. The weight from snowmobiles can cause these holes to collapse and the seals that stay there to be broken.

Some of the harshest and most broad criticism was expressed by Jason Roberts, owner of the film production company Polar X, whose experience over many years includes high-profile feature movie and TV projects. Roberts, who some years ago was penalized for violations of the governor’s policies including illegal transport and the filming of a man in a cage attacked by a polar bear, argues the Norwegian Polar Institute’s data is “so weak that it cannot be used as an argument in this context” and “we must question the motives of the governor’s constant undermining of rights and privileges of local people and local companies.”

“This proposal will lead to a massive negative effect on the operation of PolarX and our customers,” Roberts wrote. “Firstly it will put the safety of personnel in unnecessary danger. Secondly, it will lead to an extreme loss of income and large additional costs. We hereby notify that all lost income, any additional costs and future losses due to the implementation of this proposal will constitute a legal basis for applying for compensation.”

“We have been responding to this consultation for several years without being able to see our input, on behalf of our members or permanent residents of Svalbard, are taken into account or heard. It is an unfortunate development to close frozen fjords to permanent residents who have the knowledge and expertise to travel, as they are also good ambassadors for Svalbard nature, as well as good observers,” the association’s statement notes.

“This proposal is subjective, and based on one perception of local traffic that we do not recognize ourselves in.”

Nearly all of Van Mijenfjorden, left, is designated as a “quick and direct crossing only” zone (blue shaded area), while two small inlets are off-limits to motorized traffic entirely (red shaded areas) between March 15 and June 1. At right, the inner half of Templefjorden will be one of the areas off-limits to motorized traffic this spring, with traffic in the outer half allowed to cross the sea ice only directly and as quickly as safely possible.

**Ban on traffic for fourth year raises concerns**

**SNOWMOBILES, from page 11**

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“And in that sense a resource for communicating what is happening in relation to climate change and general changes in the areas. We also see that the knowledge base behind the decision seems to be subjective, and based on one perception of local traffic that we do not recognize ourselves in.”

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

**Area surrounding Svea eyed for park expansion**

**Governor proposing additional access restrictions as well as size in Nordenskiöld Land National Park**

By MARK SABBATINI

**Editor**

Expanding Nordenskiöld Land National Park to include the entire region surrounding the now-closed Svea mine, as well as implementing new access restrictions such as a ban on motor traffic, is being proposed by The Governor of Svalbard.

“The proposal for a new protection regulation for the national park proposes both a continuation of existing regulations and some new regulations,” a summary of the project notes. “The most important changes proposed are regulation of motor traffic at sea, a ban on ice-breaking, and a traffic ban in three limited areas during the breeding season for birds.”

Norway’s Ministry of Climate and Environment commissioned the governor in 2018 to propose an expansion of the park to include Van Mijenfjord with adjoining lands. The impacts of reduced sea ice due to climate change were a primary factor.

“This has negative consequences for species such as ringed seals and polar bears, which depend on sea ice as a living area,” the proposal notes.

There’s more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.
First ‘space hurricane’ seen with help from two at UNIS

In a discovery sure to illuminate the imaginations of the many believers of alien/paranormal life in the remote far north, the first-ever observation of a space hurricane in the ionosphere over the North Magnetic Pole is being revealed to the world in a study co-authored by two researchers at The University Centre in Svalbard. The space hurricane was observed on Aug. 20, 2014, when four DMSP (Defense Meteorological Satellite Program) satellites detected a cyclone-like auroral spot around the North Magnetic Pole, according to a press release published Monday by the Birkeland Centre for Space Science, a cooperative effort between three Norwegian universities including UNIS.

The hurricane lasting more than eight hours had a diameter of more than 1,000 km with multiple arms and an anti-clockwise rotation before gradually decayed and merging into the dusk-side auroral oval. “Hurricanes are well-known in the Earth’s lower atmosphere, causing destruction and harm to people and infrastructure,” Kjellmar Oksavik, a UNIS professor and study co-author. “We had no idea that a similar phenomenon could be found in the upper polar atmosphere, several hundred kilometers above the ground. Among the other co-authors of the study published in Nature Communications is UNIS Director Jøran Moen.”

EU, Svalbard feud heats up as fish quota cut due to Brexit

Norway and the EU remain caught in conflict over cod-fishing quotas off Svalbard. EU officials confirmed they think Norway is violating the Svalbard Treaty principles by cutting back on its quotas since Great Britain left the EU. Norway is also in the midst of free trade negotiations with Great Britain, which formally has withdrawn from the EU. Norway, which has sovereignty over Svalbard, thus reduced the EU’s cod quota based on the UK’s historic part of it. The EU wants to retain its full quota, which it then distributes among EU member nations. An EU spokesperson told newspaper Dagens Næringstid (DN) that it’s “unfortunate” Norway took a unilateral decision to end “well-established methods” of doling out quotas, and thus “limited the amounts of Arctic cod that the EU fleet can fish.” Norway, however, claims it now needs to also issue fishing quotas to the UK, and can’t do that without reducing the EU’s. Professor Geir Ulfstein, an expert on international courts’ legitimacy at the University of Oslo, maintains Norway is in its full rights to reduce the EU’s fishing quotas off Svalbard. “The EU can’t fish based on its understanding of what the quota should be,” Ulfstein told DN. “It’s Norway who decides. If the EU is dissatisfied it can resort to diplomacy or take its case to the courts. But Norway can arrest EU fishing boats if necessary.” He added that since Britain has left the EU, it will get its own quota and that the EU’s quota will be reduced accordingly.

Human medications detected in Arctic’s ocean food chain

Researchers from SINTEF, the Norwegian
Polar Institute and the University Centre in Svalbard have collected samples from Arctic crustaceans close to the settlement of Ny-Ålesund on the west coast of Spitsbergen. During the spring and summer, they discovered a number of drugs in a variety of different concentrations.

“These included ibuprofen…diclofenac from Voltaren, antibiotics and an antidepressant,” says SINTEF researcher Ida Beathe Øverjordet.

The aim of the project is to study our footprint on the natural world – to measure how much material is discharged, and what significance this has. The results may have an impact on the way in which we manage the Arctic regions in the future.

“It’s easy to assume that this won’t be an issue because there are so few people living in this area. However, the fact is that we found many traces of drugs in the animals,” says Øverjordet.

– The Marine Executive
Research-based education of the next generation of Arctic experts

The University Centre in Svalbard

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A tale of two burgers

**Svalbar:** Heavenly Devil burger has blessed bread, isn’t cooked to hell, is spiced right

The best burger in the city (currently), Devil burger from Svalbar.

Perfect medium fried meat with a slightly pink core. Juicy and good consistency on the meat.

Good and spicy salsa served with lovely brioche.

That's how it should be done. 🍔

9/10

**Kroa:** Sweet fries and good bacon can’t cover too-compact meat cooked for way too long

Try Kroas burger for the first time in many years.

Have controlled because I think it looks way too compact.

Turned out I was right.

Too compact and fried for too long so it becomes a dry and hard meat cake.

Plus for good bacon and that you can replace fries with sweet potato or salad.

3/10

More reviews and photos by Lasse Haug at his “Food of Svalbard” page Album at www.facebook.com/lasse.haug (direct link: tinyurl.com/...