



The world's northernmost alternative newspaper

Vol. 7, Issue 12

March 31, 2015

www.icepeople.net

Patrolling the Pole

Russia scraps Barneo ice camp, builds separate support sites for military and science expeditions

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

They've hosted barbers, figure skaters, marathon runners and thousands of others seeking unique thrills at the top of the world, but Russia is making it more clear than ever this year their North Pole ambitions go way beyond fun and games.

The country is abandoning the Barneo ice camp it has operated on the sea ice at about 89 degrees latitude north for a few weeks every April during the past 14 years in favor of two longer-range bases that will emphasize military and science projects instead of tourist expeditions, according to the Expeditionary Center of the Russian Geographical Society.

Tourist expeditions, which generally in-



EXPEDITIONARY CENTER OF THE RUSSIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

Russian paratroopers, left, descend onto the sea ice at about 89 degrees and 47 minutes north latitude Monday to construct a support camp for North Pole expeditions. At right,, workers inspect fuel drums that will be dropped, along with other equipment, by parachute onto the ice camp.

volve a "last-degree" ski trip of about 60 kilometers to the North Pole, will continue this year – and the leader of one major company said Monday he's received no notice of any changes in Russia's hosting plans – but "this year the base will operate primarily for scientists," a

statement by the geographical society notes.

There are no plans to cancel the Barneo project permanently, according to the agency.

"Next year it will continue its existence with all interested operators, but this season our

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Comedown after contact high



NASA / OPERATION ICEBRIDGE

The *Lance* is photographed by a C-130 plane during NASA's Operation IceBridge flight March 19.

Lance struggling to return 'home' after successful hookup with space case in compatibility test

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

As scientists, they're probably aware of how achieving a contact high can be followed by the letdown of being left out in the cold.

The *Lance* research vessel achieved a literal high point of its nearly three-month-old mission in the sea ice north of Svalbard by coordinating a simultaneous check of conditions with a flyover conducted by the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

The rendezvous will provide researchers with additional supporting data for their respective studies.

"It was about a year of 'I know that you're out there, I'm going to ask you on a date, I promise I'm going to ask you,'" said Jackie

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Devastating diet



Bears wipe out bird flocks as ice vanishes
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Pitying the polar bear



Questions about attacked campers linger
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Rip-roaring revs



What makes a fox crazy? Too much gas
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Spying for science



Norway, Russia join for work in wild
icepeople.net

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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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.

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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.

'No chicks or eggs of any species...survived'



JOUKE PROP / UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN

A polar bear raids the nesting grounds of barnacle geese at Nordenskiöldkysten, an increasingly common way for bears to seek food during the past decade as climate change has dissolved much of the sea ice they traditional hunt seals from. "We had the first polar bear predation (there) in 2004," said Jouke Prop, an ornithologist from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, a principal author of a new study analyzing the bears' feeding habits in Svalbard and Greenland. "In most of the years since, predation has been really severe." He told *Science* magazine he has observed polar bears at Nordenskiöldkysten eating more than 200 eggs in two hours, and last year no chicks or eggs of any species—barnacle geese, eiders, and glaucous gulls—survived. The study, published in *Frontier in Ecology and Evolution*, is available at tinyurl.com/olg9du5.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

This week's episode of Arctic Cold War Chronicles is titled "it's good Russia is bad," which is the theme of an *Aftenposten* feature about Longyearbyen that begins with the locals declaring "Putin is our best friend." That's the simplified answer to the article's question of "can Russian saber rattling in northern regions contribute to saving Svalbard's cornerstone business?" It's not a huge surprise local politicians and coal miners suspect the Norwegian government will give Store Norske a desperately needed bailout loan to ensure the country maintains a strong presence here, since Russia is openly doing the same thing by propping up its fledgling operations in Barentsburg and Pyramiden. That doesn't mean officials on the mainland are entirely happy about it - the article quotes Jakob Godzimirski, a Russia expert with the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, as saying Svalbard is Norway's "Achilles heel" in that "coal is not something that we need, (but) it is important to have a Norwegian settlement in Svalbard to show that we have something to do purely for practical reasons." ... Of course, an NRK article



STORE NORSKO

The latest anti-spy technology: An obscuring substance known as "snow" does wonders to keep foes from using our coal mine webcam.

reminds us Parliament hasn't actually approved the loan yet and, while it is scheduled to decide in April, Store Norske is facing almost immediate bankruptcy if something goes awry. Which is why one of the more interesting corporate press releases this week came from **AF Gruppen, which announced a new 250-million-kroner contract to continue providing logistical services to Store Norske until September 2018.** That isn't leaving the subcontractor feeling flush, since "significant cost savings" are part of the terms, but obviously higher-up corporate folks aren't expecting any major surprises from politicians ... Finally, while the investigation into the March 19 polar bear attack on a group of campers is pending, **it's safe to say there's a near-unanimous verdict favoring the animal in the local court of public opinion.** The bear, seen in widely published photos last winter with its mother and a sibling, was again captured on film repeatedly shortly before the attack, resulting in scathing social media comments such as the campers "being so stupid and arrogant" in picking their campsites.



JOSHUA HOLKO / FACEBOOK

No mercy: Locals watched this bear as a cub, only to see him and his sister killed as youths.



GUNNAR SPREEN / NORWEGIAN POLAR INSTITUTE

Researchers from the *Lance* campaign prepare a survey field on an ice floe for NASA's Operation IceBridge's overflight by marking it with plastic bags and orange poles to resemble a runway.

Lance, NASA compare vital stats

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Richter-Menge, co-leader of NASA's Operation IceBridge project, in a press release issued by the agency. "Then the time for the date comes and it becomes more of a rapid-fire, detailed conversation."

First, of course, they have to meet each other, which turned out to be something of a challenge resembling a blind date.

"We were probably about one minute – four miles – away from the ship when we spotted it, and we had a little time to react to it," said John Sonntag, IceBridge's field team leader. "But the survey line near the ship, which was our real target, was much harder to see than the ship itself. The Norwegian field team did a huge amount of labor to set it up, to make it look for the pilots a bit like a runway, but still, from 1,500 feet up and two to three nautical miles away, that was very hard to see."

IceBridge is NASA's biannual airborne survey of polar sea and land ice, and its March 19 flight that passed above the northeast coast of Greenland before reaching the *Lance* was the inaugural flight of this year's project.

The *Lance* is at the midpoint of a planned six-month expedition where the Norwegian Polar Institute vessel is frozen into the sea ice studying its progress "from cradle to grave" in order to develop more accurate monitoring and prediction methods. Scientists from 10 countries are participating in what is being hailed as one of the institute's most ambitious projects ever.

The ship and crew have encountered several difficulties since departing Longyearbyen on Jan. 11, including being pushed out of the ice when the vessel drifted too far south. But with the ship now trying to return to Longyearbyen during Easter for a crew change, participants are discovering "getting out of the ice will not be easy," according to the project's official blog (tinyurl.com/p84frrc).

"Due to wind conditions, the ice is compact, and progress is rather slow, but with some skill and patience she will eventually make it out all right," wrote Harald Steen, the expedition's leader.

In addition to a new crew and group of scientists, an exchange of equipment will occur since some is in need of repair while new instruments are needed for different types of data collection scheduled to take place during the second half of the expedition.

"The upcoming legs will also see an increased effort on studying the effect of solar radiation and the fate of the ecosystem, using remotely operated vehicles (ROVs), drones, divers and airplanes," Steen wrote.

Turbulent weather during the days before the NASA flyover allowed the departing scientists to spot new cracks in floes followed by new ice development that showed an "enormous impact on the energy balance and the biogeochemistry of our surroundings," he noted.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Questions about campers linger after polar bear attack

Numerous questions remain unanswered about a March 19 polar bear attack at a campsite that injured one man, especially regarding the group's preparedness and actions after the attack, but The Governor of Svalbard said investigators are unlikely to finish their work until after Easter. A tripwire alarm system failed to work properly, there was nobody standing guard when the bear attacked at about 5:30 a.m. and the group didn't notify the governor's office about the encounter until 50 minutes after it occurred. The two-year-old bear, observed and photographed by several people during the days before the attack, was described as healthy and unlikely to invade a campsite out of desperation for food.

Injured snowmobiler found unconscious in riverbed

A man seriously injured in a snowmobile accident Sunday night at Diabasodden is in stable condition at University Hospital of North Norway in Tromsø, according to officials. "We found him down in the riverbed, or a wind hole," said Christian Svarstad, a police chief lieutenant for The Governor of Svalbard. "He was not conscious, but he was breathing and had a pulse." The man was driving in the area alone and friends notified the governor's office when he failed to return by 11 p.m. He was discovered during a helicopter search at 1:22 a.m. Conditions were described as about minus 10 degrees Celsius with strong winds, but the spot he was found at was somewhat sheltered from the elements. Details of his specific injuries were not released.

Man hospitalized after falling 10 meters from climbing wall

A man in his 30s who fell about 10 meters from the climbing wall inside Svalbardhallen on Friday night was flown to University Hospital of North Norway in Tromsø, according to The Governor of Svalbard. The cause of the incident remains under investigation, but it appears proper climbing gear was used and friction from a rope apparently slowed the rate of the man's fall, said Ståle Nylund, a police chief lieutenant for the governor.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly cloudy. SW winds to 39 km/h. High -7C (-13C wind chill), low -11C (-17C wind chill). Sunrise: 5:09a, sunset: 8:52p	Partly cloudy. S winds to 39 km/h. High -11C (-18C wind chill), low -13C (-19C wind chill). Sunrise: 5:00a, sunset: 9:00p	Partly cloudy. SW winds to 32 km/h. High -14C (-18C wind chill), low -14C (-20C wind chill). Sunrise: 4:52a, sunset: 9:09p	Partly cloudy. NW winds to 25 km/h. High -13C (-18C wind chill), low -15C (-21C wind chill). Sunrise: 4:42a, sunset: 9:17p
Extended forecast: Sunday, p. cloudy, -4C (-10C), -14C (-19C), light 16:53h; Monday, snow, 0C (-7C), -3C (-10C), light 17:11h; Tuesday, rain/snow, 0C (-4C), -3C (-6C), light 17:30h; Wednesday, cloudy, -3C (-7C), -12C (-19C), light 17:50h			
Data provided by storm.no			



JON AARS / NORWEGIAN POLAR INSTITUTE

A trio of snowmobiles is observed by researchers attempting to determine the impact of traffic on Arctic foxes. The study found snowmobiles alter the animals' behavior, but not survival rates.

Why is a fox crazy? Engines

Study: Heavy snowmobile traffic alters behavior of animals, but not breeding or survival rates

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

A large group of snowmobilers probably won't be shocked to see all those engines affecting the behavior of nearby wildlife. But a new study suggests the ruckus is more of a nuisance than existential threat for at least one group of animals.

Researchers who set up 20 cameras that took pictures of snowmobiles every five min-

utes in two areas of Nordenskiöld Land – one with heavy traffic, one with light – discovered "both changed behavior and limited activity" of Arctic foxes in the busier area, according to the Norwegian Polar Institute study published last week (tinyurl.com/os7ypxy).

However, "the study documents no correlation between Arctic fox reproduction and survival in relation to current traffic levels." At the same time, the researchers noted other factors such as climate change and pollution may make snowmobile traffic more of a threat in the future.

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

Russia bailing on Barneo – sort of

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team has another mission," the statement notes.

Eric Philips, owner of Ictrek and president of the International Polar Guides Association, said he's approaching this season the same as the previous 12 years he's led expeditions – even referring to the ice camp as "Barneo" – since he'd "likely be among the first to know" if Russia was drastically altering its support for tourist expeditions.

"The season, from my perspective of the tourists and skiers, is that nothing has changed," he said.

Victor Boyarsky of Vicaar International Projects and Expeditions, a logistics company based in Moscow, told Explorersweb, "if everything goes as planned, we expect to have the first commercial flight with skiers from Longyearbyen, Svalbard, on April 3. This year Barneo camp will be closed on April 25."

North Pole expeditions departing from Longyearbyen to Barneo typically occur during the first three weeks of April, although weather and sea ice conditions often alter the timing by several days at both ends of the calendar.

A floating science station, named "North Pole-2015" is scheduled to remain in operation

for up to six months beginning in April. A series of military exercises, known as "Victory 2015," will be conducted at another site in observation of the 70th anniversary of the victory in WWII and the 85th anniversary of Russia's Airborne Forces.

A post Monday on the society's Facebook page states that, after several days of searching for a suitable place to construct an ice runway for the science base, equipment and paratroopers were dropped onto a site at about 89 degrees and 47 minutes north latitude and 48 degrees and 35 minutes east longitude.

Russia has maintained an aggressive posture about "owning" the North Pole, including numerous high-profile acts such as planting a flag on the seabed there in 2007 (a nuclear submarine planted another flag last summer) and annual consecration services by religious leaders to symbolize the country's efforts toward "the return of the country's former position in the region." Canada and Denmark have recently joined the territorial dispute by filing continental shelf claims under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

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

What's up

April 1

6 p.m.: Movie: "Annie," U.S. drama/musical, all ages. Kulturhuset.

April 6

5 p.m.: Movie: "Asterix: Le Domaine Des Dieux" (3D), French animated, all ages. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "Fast and Furious 7," U.S. action/thriller, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

April 8

6 p.m.: Movie: "Asterix: Le Domaine Des Dieux," French animated, all ages. Kulturhuset.

April 10

Camp Svalbard winter session for youths 13-16. Registration and more details at ingeborg.runde@lokalstyre.no.

April 12

5 p.m.: Movie: "The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel," U.S. comedy, all ages. Kulturhuset.

7:30 p.m.: Movie: "The Gunman," Spanish/French/British action/thriller, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

April 13

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

April 15

6 p.m.: Movie: "The Gunman." Kulturhuset.

April 19

9 p.m.: Movie: "Chappie," U.S. comedy/sci-fi, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

April 20

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

April 22

6 p.m.: Movie: "Avengers: Age of Ultron" (3D), U.S. action/fantasy, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

April 26

5 p.m.: Movie: "The DUFF," U.S. romance/comedy, all ages. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "Pride," British comedy/drama, ages 7 and up. 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:

- *Antarctica reaches 63°F in heat wave*
- *U.K. greenhouse gas down 8.4% in '14*
- *Japan's whalers strike out in Antarctica*
- *New 'Sibirosaurus' dinosaur discovered*