



Soviet coup? Nyet!

WikiLeaks: Russia's power-grab attitude in Svalbard alarmed U.S., which had an eye on oil

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

See if any of this sounds familiar: Norway worrying about Russia making a power grab in Svalbard. Russia complaining Norway is excessively authoritarian. A seemingly endless dispute about boundaries. The United States attempting to intervene because oil and democracy are at stake.

Those disputes raging today in what some call a "new" Cold War were generating plenty of heat during the old Cold War in the mid 1970s, according to a new batch of documents released this week by WikiLeaks. The cables show U.S. officials felt Norway was taking a "super-cautious policy of non-provocation" despite worries about Soviet aggression.

"The Norwegians have become concerned over the progressive erosion of their sovereignty on Svalbard due to inadequate local administrative resources there and the Soviet

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LARISSA BEUMER / UNIS



EVA THERESE JENSEN / UNIS



HANNE CHRISTIANSEN / UNIS



BJØRN JENSEN / UNIS

Graduate students, left, perform field work in Coles Bay this spring for an ecology course at The University Centre in Svalbard. At top right, Heidi Sevestre helps other members of a glaciology research group pack. A group of geology students, middle right, ride to a site dressed for minus 35-degree-Celsius cold. At bottom right, Arctic technology students take a lunch break in Adventdalen.

Cold is the new hot

Record number of UNIS students participating in field excursions struggle and succeed in -35 cold

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

As with many schools, class sizes are increasing to capacity. But here the classrooms are still a long, long way from being full.

A record number of students are participating in about 40 different field excursions this month at The University Centre in Svalbard. Director of Safety and Logistics Fred Skancke Hansen, in a statement released by the university, said the record is "due to the fact that almost all courses are full this semester."

But while other college students are get-

ting some sun by hitting the beaches for spring break this time of year, those at UNIS are taking in their breathtaking views in temperatures of minus 35 degrees Celsius at times.

For Heidi Sevestre, a PhD student helping drill a 400-meter deep hole in a glacier using a drill that relies on high-pressure running water, that's a bit of problem. Beyond the not insignificant matter of group members risking the loss of their fingers in the cold, that is.

After two days of rapid progress in Van Mijenfjorden, "in a few minutes everything changed" on the third day when temperatures dropped and a team member discovered "the equipment was completely frozen," she wrote

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Meat meets anti-meat at N. Pole

Vegan marathon winner among this year's firsts as expedition, research season into full swing

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

For every vegan who's been called a wimp, here's your revenge.

One of your tribe blew away the time record at the North Pole Marathon this year. On the worst course in the race's eight-year history. Also, she has only one kneecap.

Fiona Oakes, 43, seared 44 minutes off the

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POLAR RUNNING ADVENTURES

Fiona Oakes crosses the North Pole Marathon finish line near the Barneo ice camp Monday.

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.

A dog-beat-dog world



Dogs nestle down Saturday evening after running the 40-kilometer first stage of the Trappers Trail dogsledding race from Longyearbyen to Kapp Laila. At right, mushers participating in the two-day race gather to hear the first-day results. Erik Rodesjö and Solfrid Håkenstad beat seven competitors in the large-team division in a record time of three hours, 36 minutes and 18 seconds, 19 seconds ahead of Liv Bjørsvik and Mads Leiddal. Lena Danielsen prevailed over six opponents in the small-team division with a time of 3:47:22 Photos by Veronica Andersen.



Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

We generally don't put much Earth-shaking news in this space since we're rarely sober when filling it, but sometimes it's really the world that's wobbling and not just us. So we're wondering if we're just unusually insensitive journalists or **did anyone else not notice Svalbard got rattled by a magnitude 4.5 earthquake at 9:29 p.m. Sunday?** It was north of the archipelago at 85.27 degrees north and had a 10-kilometer hypocenter (whatever that means), according to *Earthquake Report*. Normally we ignore these occasional shakers that would cause damage in civilized areas, but since it is North Pole season it'd be interesting to know if any expeditioners felt it – and possibly mistook it for something else amidst all the other miseries in the harsh conditions ... Speaking of paying huge amounts of money for recreational activities in miserable conditions, **a new initiative to lure superyachts to our waters has been launched by a group of Very Important Persons**, including Parliament member Magnus Strangeland, according to *Superyachts.com*. There's not a lot of specifics yet about how to entice the owners of those 30-plus-meter vessels, although the boat brains have determined Svalbard is a popular destination because of its polar bears. But what we're wondering is if those potential tycoon tourists are too smart (as evidenced by their mass accumulation of wealth) to risk their prized vessels in our icy and unpredictable waters, or too stupid (having spent enough on a leisure-time boat to fund a small national economy) to think about the dangers ... Staying

with questionable judgements involve boats and lots of money, **a company may have lost a 1.5-billion-kroner contract to build Norway a new ice-class research vessel in a sealed-bid tender because – wait for it – somebody forgot to seal the envelope before mailing it.** Jan-Gunnar Winther, director of the Norwegian Polar Institute, told NRK "if it has an open envelope, someone can come in and both remove and modify documents...that is why it is so strict that it might seem a bit comical." Knowing the company, whose name was not revealed, was one of 12 submitting bids probably didn't keep the unfortunate employee from becoming any less unglued ... It might seem unbelievable given our insignificance and nefariousness, but ***Icepeople* has an evil twin that's trying to invade your homes.** OK, not exactly an evil twin, more like a polar opposite. French/American filmmaker Anne Aghion shot a scientists-in-Antarctica documentary in 2008 called "Ice People" that, if we were real jerks, we could have raised a stink about since we started using that name (one word instead of two) ourselves while in the Antarctic seven years earlier. We didn't snag the ".com" Web domain at the time, so now she has it (so if you've ever found yourself at the wrong end of the world looking for us you now know why) along with other better-than-us things like a rave review in *The New York Times*. She just e-mailed to say the documentary and her other films are now available as DVDs and digital downloads so – for reasons escaping the faintly sober part of our minds – we're giving her a free plug here.



CHRISTIAN ASLUND / GREENPEACE

Actor Ezra Miller, above, pulls his sled through tough ice conditions with the help of an expedition team member near the North Pole. The group, seeking to have the region declared a global sanctuary, is planning to drop a "flag for the future" through an ice hole to the seabed four kilometers below the surface at the Pole. At right, Russian amphibious vehicles get stuck in a break in the ice while trying to reach the top of the world.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BARNEO ICE CAMP

For some, just the top isn't enough

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previous women's record with a time of 4 hours and 53 minutes, the third-fastest overall time in this year's race.

"I knew it was going to be bad but just how bad I couldn't possibly have prepared for," the Asheldham, England, resident wrote on her Facebook page. "Not just the consequences of running at -30 with a wind chill, but for half the course through deep snow. I haven't got the longest legs in the world and kept falling. It was so deep as when you put your foot on it you didn't know if it was frozen enough to take your weight."

Such difficulties are adding challenges to those trying to reach the North Pole this month, often in increasingly demanding and eccentric ways to be among those achieving some kind of "first."

Oakes, 43, who's run a 2:38 marathon in

"normal" conditions, slogged through the icy hazards as part of a series of extreme races she's participating in to raise funds for a vegan advocacy group and a sanctuary where she cares for 400 animals. She lost her left kneecap in an injury as a teenager, but managed to adapt a new running style despite being told by doctors walking normally would be difficult.

Among others seeking firsts are Russian expeditioners Fedor Konyukhov and Victor Simonov, who are attempting a 4,000-kilometer dogsledding trip from the Russian polar station on the island of Golomännj to Resolute Bay, Canada, via the North Pole.

"This is the longest route in the Arctic, which will become an extreme test of human possibilities for both explorers," Konyukhov wrote at his website.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Local youths dispute survey showing high alcohol use

Longyearbyen School students are disputing a survey that finds their alcohol, drug and tobacco use far higher than the mainland. "The survey must be taken with a pinch of salt – many have responded with nonsense in this study," said Torje Hanssen, head of the student council. "We are young. Whenever there are such studies, there are many answers that are unserious." The survey, which received 90 responses from local students, reported one in three high school students have been drunk, twice the rate of the mainland. Other council members said they are dismayed at the widespread media coverage of the results, which they say are misleading since the problem is no worse than other towns. Trude Aalmen, a senior advisor for KoRus-Nord, said she is confident in the results since there is a "washing" of figures to account for dishonest answers. In addition, separate data and interviews with local officials support the findings.

Church gives blessing to spreading ashes in Svalbard

The Norwegian Church has reversed its objection to spreading the ashes of the deceased and is blessing such ceremonies locally, according to Svalbard Church Priest Leif Magne Helgesen. "We see that the dispersion is a trend, and many have a relationship to Svalbard," he said. "In Svalbard Church we are pleased to participate, but we must take practical precautions about where and when." The government approved such ceremonies in Svalbard five years ago, with both applications submitted since approved. The most recent, for former longtime resident Jon Sandmo, is scheduled this summer, but will likely not involve the church due to his beliefs.

Man fined 43K for DUI crash in Ny-Ålesund on New Year's

A man in his 40s who drove his vehicle off a road in Ny-Ålesund on New Year's Day while legally drunk was fined 43,000 kroner, received a 24-day suspended jail sentence and has lost his driver's license for a year, according to the Svalbard governor's office. He received the sentence as a court plea bargain Thursday.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy. N winds to 18 km/h. High -14C (-19C wind chill), low -16C (-20C wind chill).	Clear. E winds to 22 km/h. High -14C (-19C wind chill), low -17C (-22C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. Variable winds to 32 km/h. High -7C (-12C wind chill), low -16C (-21C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. NW winds to 49 km/h. High -6C (-14C wind chill), low -14C (-20C wind chill).
Sunrise 3:48a; sunset 10:18p	Sunrise 3:36a; sunset 10:29p	Sunrise 3:25a; sunset 10:41p	Sunrise 3:12a; sunset 10:55p
Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -11C (-17C), -14C (-20C), light 20:11h; Monday, p. cloudy, -10C (-14C), -12C (-17C), light 20:43h; Tuesday, cloudy, -9C (-13C), -12C (-16C), light 21:20h; Wednesday, cloudy, -10C (-15C), -13C (-17C), light 21:55h			

Data provided by storm.no



WIKILEAKS

A bar graph shows search results for "Svalbard" at WikiLeaks, with nearly all belonging to a batch of documents released this week addressing Russia's interest in expanding its role in the archipelago.

WikiLeaks: Soviets not 'special'

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attitude," states a Sept. 17, 1973, cable from the U.S. State Department to top-ranking NATO officials. Tormod Petter Svennevig, Norway's foreign ministry undersecretary at the time, "described the Soviet approach as essentially one of requesting a special status on Svalbard, different from that of the other signatories to the 1920 treaty."

A subsequent State Department cable to U.S. Defense Department officials in Oslo and Moscow, dated March 5, 1974, asserted "Norwegian officials should bear in mind that the Soviet Union is only one of the signatories to the treaty and that Norway is therefore not alone in its struggle to maintain its sovereignty over the island group."

The messages from 1973 to 1976 are part of what WikiLeaks calls "The Kissinger Cables," named then-U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. The collection of two million records includes 364 containing the word "Svalbard."

Other messages discuss topics such as oil drilling prospects, futile efforts to resolve continental shelf boundaries determining which country has access to such natural resources, potential military threats posed by the Soviets' presence and proposals for cooperation on sci-

entific research.

"Growing interest in Svalbard and offshore oil and mineral resources has raised further the strategic importance of the area," the March 5, 1974, cable notes. "The Soviets probably consider that the present situation basically meets their military and security interests in the north, although they can be expected to continue to look for ways to strengthen their strategic position, for example by eroding Norwegian sovereignty over Svalbard."

The cables are the third batch of "leaks" during the past few years.

A smaller collection of documents released by WikiLeaks in July of 2011 show the U.S. saw great oil drilling potential for its rigs, but had concerns about Norwegian-Russian disputes and suggested a possible lessening of Norway's authority to approve exploration since it might unfairly restrict other nations.

A chilly U.S. attitude toward Norway was also revealed documents published in November of 2010 by a University of Tromsø professor. The collection of several hundred documents from the U.S. Embassy in Oslo expressed fears Norway would pull the U.S. into an unwanted dispute with Russia.

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

Numb students find failure can be fun

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this week in a blog documenting the project.

"Water circulating in the pipe 400 meters long is too cold and when it touched the metal end of the drill, an ice plug formed and blocked the whole system already under considerable pressure," Sevestre wrote. Releasing the pressure quickly was necessary to prevent blown pipes and damaging machinery.

"The urgency now is to remove the drill as quickly as possible to Longyearbyen to estimate the extent of damage and whether the equipment can be reused later in the month as planned," she wrote.

Yet despite the setback, the mood at the now relatively empty field site is sunny.

"The atmosphere has become more relaxed and happy," with the unexpected coziness of extra sleeping bags and reindeer skins, and we look forward to the unexpected avail-

ability of four sleeping bags, Sevestre wrote. As for the research, "we have three days left to gather data and the days will be the more majestic...and even if the sun does not warm, it really is still a big difference in morale."

Other students, in addition to a mandatory safety course, are participating in projects ranging from Arctic biology to technology to geology. The university also notes the first research cruises depart at the end of April, including a geophysics project focusing on air/ice/sea interaction, and a technology project examining instrumental and structure loads.

UNIS received a record number of applications for the beginning of the academic year last fall and the 235 students currently enrolled includes 82 bachelor's degree students taking a full course load, an increase of 20 from 2009.

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

What's up

April 11

7 p.m.: Concert featuring works of Sami mythology by Frode Fjellheim, Anneli Drecker and other Troms region musicians. Svalbard Church.

7 p.m.: Standup comedy show "Klaus på Kanten," recorded by TV2 as part of project to capture locally-adapted show in 11 different small towns. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Debut of graphics monotypes exhibit by Rudolf Overå, his sixth at the gallery. Galleri Svalbard.

April 12

Noon: Board of Youth Authority meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

April 13-14

Open day at Fredheim, hosted by governor, featuring presentations about the history of the fishing station.

April 14

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Pitch Perfect," U.S. comedy/musical, all ages, Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Zero Dark Thirty," U.S. thriller, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

April 15

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

April 16

7 p.m.: Discussion w/ Svein og Karin Mella, hosted by Priest Leif Magne Helgesen. Svalbard Church.

April 17

10 a.m.: Bydrift board meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Eventyrland," Norwegian drama, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

April 20-21

Open day at Fredheim, hosted by governor, featuring presentations about the history of the fishing station.

1 p.m.: Outdoor Mass at Fredheim. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "The Place Beyond the Pines," U.S. drama/crime, ages 11 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:

- *Arctic summers may be ice-free by 2020*
- *The next wine capital is ... Montana?!*
- *Study: Warming will make flights bumpier*
- *Aaargh! Greenland sinks Pirate Bay's raid*