



## SVALBARD AND NORTH POLE TOURISM: GETTING TOO HOT TO BE COOL?



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALAN CHAMBERS



BARNEO ICE CAMP

Alan Chambers, left, guides his 11th expedition to the North Pole earlier this month despite a combination of minus 40 degree Celsius temperatures and an unusually large amount of open water. At right, Barneo Ice Camp workers celebrate their departure for the season Tuesday with fireworks.

# Happy trails to few...

*N. Pole trailblazers add notches; protesters peak; stag party sags*

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

North Pole trekkers tend to share a few common mentalities. Being part of a small exclusive group. A desire to achieve firsts and/or benefit worthy causes. The fear there might only be a few years left for such trips.

Melting ice caused this year's season at the Barneo Ice Camp to end a few days early as the final group of tourists departed by helicopter Sunday evening. Temperatures were minus 25 degrees Celsius as the camp prepared to close Monday, but the record low Arctic ice sheet cover that shocked scientists

during the past year took its toll.

"Flying back to the camp the pilots saw a new split (in the ice) about 250-300 meters from Barneo," notes an entry Monday in the camp's blog ([barneo-polus.livejournal.com](http://barneo-polus.livejournal.com)). "The ice floe is all cut away. It's time to fly home!"

But the combination of bitter cold and unusually high amounts of open water didn't prevent another year of firsts at the North Pole, if not as famous or eccentric as some during Barneo's 12-year history.

Among the late-season pioneers was  
**See BARNEO, page 4**

# ...Until we fleet again...

*Spitsbergen cruise passengers nearly double in 2012; Russian officials seek the 'next Svalbard'*

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

To all the expeditioners and ski marathoners in town: Sorry, but you're not really off the beaten path.

The number of cruise ship passengers in Svalbard nearly doubled in 2012 compared to  
**See CRUISE, page 3**

## Inside

**Tabloid trash news you can skip** Page 2

**Headlines from Svalbardposten**

- Store Norske's woes continue, layoffs coming
- Norwegian Air plans to offer year-round service
- Man jailed after non-fatal Barentsburg stabbing

Page 3

**Weather forecast** Page 3

**Events calendar** Page 4

# Reality: You're skiing for second

*World Cup champion Eldar Rønning joins record Svalbard Skimarathon crowd Saturday*

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

This seems like a particularly good year for the "all participants in this race are winners" cliché, since in all likelihood the actual competition is for second place.

A record people – roughly 690, compared to last year's record of 599 – are registered for Saturday's 21st annual Svalbard Skimarathon,

**See RACE, page 4**



SVALBARD TURN

Anita Johansen, Frank Jakobsen and Kåre Hovland work on course preparations at the Mine 6 start/finish line of the Svalbard Skimarathon.

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

### Editor

Mark Sabbatini

### Copy Editor

Brennan Purtzer

### Principal of principles

Kristan Hutchison

### Psychiatrist

Irene Gallion

### Mailing address

*Icepeople*  
Vei 210 -2- 13  
Longyearbyen, Svalbard  
9170  
Norway

### Telephone

Norway: +47 41 51 46 38  
U.S. +1 (970) 673-4472

### E-mail

marksabbatini@yahoo.com

### Web site

www.icepeople.net

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

## Copyright stuff

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

## Corrections policy

When we screw up you'll know about it – on the front page. One of the big complaints about newspapers is they tend to bury corrections and clarifications deep inside where few people who read the original article see them. If we need to fix something, an alert box on the front page will state what story is in error and where the full correction is printed.

## Submitting material

Letters, columns, photos and other material are welcome, but we can't offer pay for published items since nobody here is getting paid at the moment. Submissions in electronic form (text, Word documents, JPEGs, etc.) are highly preferred, although typing and/or scanning of items will be considered on a per-case basis. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, accuracy, libel and other reasons, but we will also make every reasonable effort to contact the author about any changes prior to publication.

## Just more trashy news (no need to read this)



TROND ESPEN HAUG / SYSSELMANNEN

Winners of the Svalbard governor's annual "trash lottery" pick up debris along a beach in northern Spitsbergen during the summer of 2012. Applications for this year's pickup are now being accepted until May 20, but since only 24 people are selected from a pool typically numbering in the hundreds there's really no reason to do so (full disclosure: it's possible *Icepeople* staff have already entered and are trying to improve the odds). Two groups of 12 people will be selected, with the first group departing July 27 aboard the *Nordsyssel*. A helicopter will bring the second group to the beach July 30 and bring the first group home. The *Nordsyssel* will bring the second group home Aug. 4. A total of 329 locals have collected 1,250 cubic meters of trash from 540 miles of shoreline during the previous 13 pickups. Participants must be at least 18 years old, a registered resident of Svalbard and in good physical shape. Priority is given to applicants who have not previously participated. The entry form is at <http://skjema.sysselmannen.no/cng/Sysselmannen/StrandryddingPaamelding>.

## Icesheet

*Random bits of the week's weirdness:*

The great thing if you're a politician going to policy meeting at the North Pole – besides being an awesome boondoggle, of course – is the safe assumption you won't be hassled by hecklers. Or so it would seem. But **Arctic Council members had a chill put in their conference at the top of the world by Greenpeace, which made a not-so-coincidental timing decision to arrive at the same time.** So the Greenpeace folks got gobs of global press for dropping a flag on the North Pole seabed as part of their call for a moratorium on drilling and other commercial activity in the Arctic, while the Council's discussions of actual policy got...crickets. But turnabout is fair play and Greenpeace – which infamously blockaded the Svea mine and then got busted by customs for carrying a lot of undeclared beer aboard their ship a few years ago – got an earful from people reading about their flag feat. "Let's see if I've got this right," wrote a commenter at *The Guardian's* website. "They hitched a ride on a fossil-fuel burning helicopter in order to have a photo call at the North Pole whilst protesting and saying (and I quote) 'We're asking that this area be declared a global sanctuary, off-limits to oil companies and political posturing.'" ... Among the other amusing skeptic rants in the webosphere this week is this "**best rated**" comment about an **Earth Day article about our Doomsday Vault** by the McClatchy newspaper chain: "how have all those 'end of the world' predictions worked



PHOTO COURTESY OF GREENPEACE

**Curses, foiled again:** The Arctic Council apparently visited the North Pole, but made zero effort – not even an ego photo – to publicize the trip. So instead we're running another photo of the Greenpeace folks who totally out PR'd them.

out? Any end in sight for that quick little war over in the Middle East? How has the War on Drugs been working out, or the War on Terror? I could go on, but why am I wasting my time on you at all, after reading years of your rubbish?" It appears he has a slight majority of the other chatters on his side, which naturally we won't judge as good or bad ... But we will give a nod to serious scientific thought with this fun stat: Jan-Gunnar Winther, director of the Norwegian Polar Institute, responds to a *Dagsavisen* column arguing Norway needs to be more active in research by pointing out "**while we only contribute 0.6 percent of total world scientific knowledge production, the share was 5.7 percent in terms of polar research in 2009-2011.** We rank third in the world, after the United States and Canada, in terms of scientific publications on the Arctic."

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM  
**SVALBARDPOSTEN**  
VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

**Store Norske still struggling in 2013 due to low coal prices**

Store Norske's struggles, which resulted in a 234 million kroner loss in 2012, are continuing this year and will result in layoffs to an unspecified number of workers, according to Administrative Director Per Andersson. "The price of coal is 15 percent below what we budgeted," he said. The company has started to reverse the situation by cutting costs, he said, but did not specify how much layoffs would factor into those reductions. A combination of low coal prices, a strong kroner and extensive operational problems at Svea contributed to the company's losses in 2012.

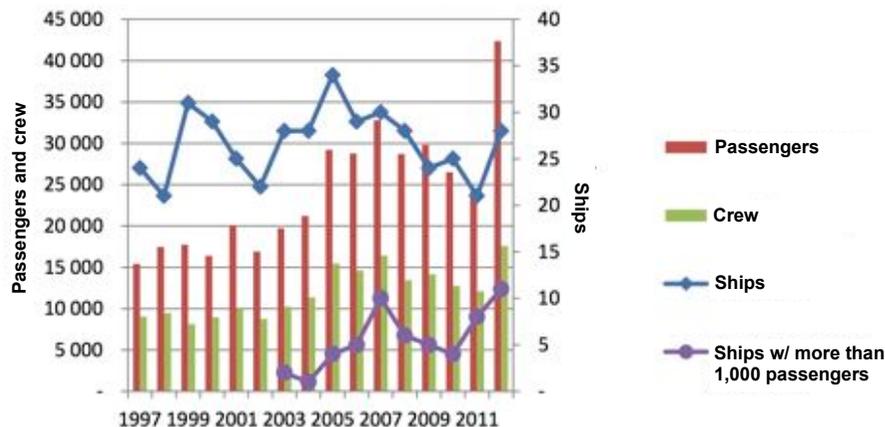
**Norwegian Air plans to offer year-round flights to Oslo**

Norwegian Air is planning to offer year-round service between Oslo and Longyearbyen, saying response to the intended seasonal schedule it began on March 1 "has been absolutely brilliant." "April also seems to be a very good month and we are very satisfied," said Lasse Sandaker-Nielsen, a spokesperson for the discount airline. "It is obvious that it needed competition on the route." The airline is scheduled to offer three direct flights between the cities until next April. The announcement is a marked change from two previous attempts by Norwegian to provide service that were quickly abandoned.

**Man faces 21 years in jail for stabbing in Barentsburg**

A Ukrainian man in his 30s is in jail for four weeks as authorities investigate his stabbing of a fellow countryman in his 20s in Barentsburg, according to the Svalbard governor's office. The attack, which occurred Sunday on the Russian community's football field, resulted in serious but not life-threatening injuries. The suspect, charged with inflicting grievous bodily harm, faces a maximum sentence of 21 years in prison. "There are some samples must be submitted for analysis," said Lt. Gov. Lars Erik Alfheim. "It will probably take some time, but during the four weeks the accused is in custody, I think we can say when we're done with the investigation and when a hearing may be scheduled if necessary."

**Total passengers, crew and cruise ships in Svalbard**



SYSSELMANNEN

A chart showing cruise ship traffic in Svalbard between 1997 and 2012 reveals passengers reached an all-time high in 2012 after several years of general decline. Less drastic increases in crew and ship totals suggest a trend of larger vessels filled to greater capacity.

**Russia sees hope in Svalbard's success**

**CRUISE, from page 1**

2011, according to the Svalbard governor's office. That excludes 17,588 crew members in 2012, compared to 12,081 in 2011.

The increase – occurring despite hitches such as a first-ever travel warning from the British government to avoid cruising here because it's supposedly too dangerous – follows a few years of general decline due largely to the global recession. But it is consistent with a longer-term trend that has seen a sharp rise in visitors since Svalbard was "opened" for tourism when Parliament designated tourism as one of three priority areas of industrial development in the area during early 1990s.

The number of "guest nights" in Longyearbyen increased from about 24,000 in 1993 to about 85,000 in 2012, with the total remaining relatively stable during the past seven years. Cruise traffic increased from about 15,000 passengers in 1993 to 33,000 in 2007, but gradually dropped through 2011.

But even with the drop during the recession, the rapid overall growth of Norwegian-based tourism in Svalbard is being eyed by Russian officials seeking to expand tourism in its Arctic territories in the region.

Restored hotels in Barentsburg and Pyramiden reopened this year in an effort to lure more than the sliver of Svalbard's overall tourism traffic staying in the Russian settlements. But Russia is also eyeing ways of using Svalbard's appeal to attract more visitors to the



ANDREY SHALYOV / BARENTS OBSERVER

Russia's plans to aggressively increase Arctic tourism are presented during a seminar of Russian and Norwegian officials last week in Arkhangelsk. One hope is Franz Josef Land, which had 1,040 tourists in 2012, can become the "next" Svalbard, which had more than 80,000 hotel "guest nights" during the same year.

Franz Josef Land archipelago a few hundred kilometers to the east.

"Wildlife on Franz Jozef Land is almost untouched in comparison with Svalbard, which can be a great advantage," notes a *Barents Observer* article summarizing a seminar of Russian and Norwegian tourism officials this month in Arkhangelsk.

Franz Jozef Land has 1,040 tourists in 2012, but could have have up to 25,000 more if visa requirements were less stringent, according to Russian National Park officials.

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

**Weather forecast for Longyearbyen**

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Rain/snow. E winds to 35 km/h. High -2C (-2C wind chill), low 0C (-3C wind chill).	Cloudy. E winds to 18 km/h. High -1C (-3C wind chill), low 0C (-3C wind chill).	Cloudy. SE winds to 35 km/h. High -2C (-3C wind chill), low 0C (-4C wind chill).	Cloudy. E winds to 35 km/h. High -2C (-3C wind chill), low -1C (-4C wind chill).
24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight

**Extended forecast:** Sunday, cloudy, 0C (-5C), -1C (-6C), light 24:00h; Monday, p. cloudy, -1C (-6C), -3C (-8C), light 24:00h; Tuesday, p. cloudy, -3C (-8C), -5C (-11C), light 24:00h; Wednesday, clear, -1C (-5C), -5C (-9C), light 24:00h

Data provided by storm.no



PHOTO COURTESY OF BARNEO ICE CAMP

Barneo Ice Camp workers and visitors square off in a "Russia Verses the Rest of the World" football match. The game failed to resolve any claims to dominion over the area, ending in a 3-3 tie.

## Pole firsts may be among the last

### BARNEO, from page 1

Cheryl Bart, who Monday became the first Australian woman, and 31st person in the world, to finish the Explorers Grand Slam of the seven major mountain summits and both poles.

"It's hard to believe we are skiing and mushing over frozen icy moving ocean," the 50something explorer wrote in her expedition blog. "Even more staggering is that the magnificent ice may not be here in one to five years."

Faysal Hanneche, 40, completed the first half of an epic endeavor by reaching the North Pole unaided April 15 before returning to Barneo (nearly all expeditioners return by helicopter). The Frechman will attempt to become the first person to reach both poles unaided with a 3,500-kilometer trek across Antarctica this fall.

Hanneche, in an interview with AFP, said he was surprised by the constant movement of the pack ice, which could in one night leave him eight kilometers farther from his goal, erasing half the distance he had progressed the

previous day.

"The pack ice moves and you adapt to the movement," he said. "After two weeks, you start to move with it. You don't look at the sun anymore (which never sets at this time of year), it's the pack ice you have to watch."

Barneo hosted its first political conference as Arctic Council ambassadors met in mid-April to discuss international cooperation in the region before visiting the Pole. But their politics were overshadowed by Greenpeace as actor Ezra Miller helped the environmental activists drop a flag on the North Pole seabed.

A chance for an eccentricity trophy was lost when the first-ever North Pole stag party failed to show. The bash by the British company Last Night of Freedom got considerable global press when announced, but apparently soon-to-be whipped guys decided the £24,999 starting cost could also buy a huge ring or a bunch of strippers.

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

## Ski champ surrendering awards – to kids

### RACE, from page 1

the most noteworthy of whom is Eldar Rønning, 30, winner of six World Cup races and numerous other events.

"I decided to start to finish the season in some exotic way and the awareness of the presence of bears around the route only increases my excitement," he said in an interview with *Sportowe Fakty*.

He may "only" be ranked 36th in the world in the current International Ski Federation standings, but race organizer Helle Jacobsen said it's safe assuming that tops the resumes of other participants.

In fact, while hardly suggesting the fix is in, Rønning has in a sense already claimed a prize since Svalbard Turn, the race's sponsoring organization, paid an undisclosed fee to attract him to the race instead of the more prestigious Skarverennet taking place the same day.

Organizers said they hoped the fee would raise the Svalbard race's profile and attract

more participants – a turnaround from a couple of years ago when a limit on entries to the rapidly growing event was imposed due to the lesser logistical help available at the time.

But interest in volunteering has increased as well, with about 120 people expected this year to help with duties such as timers, first aid and patrolling on snowmobiles with rifles to watch for polar bears.

All racers in the competitive division are getting a boost this year as their starting time has been moved up to 10 a.m., with non-competitive racers delayed until 11 a.m., in case course conditions deteriorate in mild weather during the day.

Rønning will do more than merely raise the challenge for other racers, as he is scheduled to present the prizes during the Children's Skifestival at 1 p.m. Sunday in the valley above Nybyen.

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

## What's up

### April 24

5:30 p.m.: Rehearsal concert by Polargospel. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Oblivion," U.S. action/sci-fi, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

### April 25

2 p.m.: Culture and Leisure Authority Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

7:30 p.m.: Avalanche and snow safety presentations by experts and the Svalbard governor's office. UNIS.

### April 27

10 a.m.: Svalbard Skimarathon. Competitive division begins at 10 a.m. Non-competitive and half-marathon divisions begin at 11 a.m. Course begins at Mine 6. Bus from hotels departs at 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. Registration and course details at [svalbardturn.no](http://svalbardturn.no)

7:30 p.m.: Skimarathon banquet. Prize ceremony at 10 p.m., followed by live music. Svalbardhallen.

### April 28

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

1 p.m.: Children's Skifestival. Valley above Nybyen.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Song for Marion," British drama/comedy, all ages. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Iron Man 3" (3D), U.S. action/sci-fi, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

### April 29

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

### May 1

5 p.m.: May Day Mass by interim priest Stein Karstensen in cooperation with LO Svalbard and AUF. Svalbard Church.

### May 6

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

### May 7

1 p.m.: Administration Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

## 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:

- *Labor Party OK's Lofoten oil exploration*
- *Greenie math: Earth Day in numbers*
- *Sweden naps as Russia 'bombs' bases*
- *Save the Arctic like a Rolling Stone*