



Norway wants Austre

Ministry 'working' to buy private Svalbard land tract; will owners pick homeland instead of China?

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

Despite the sighs of relief, its not a done deal yet.

Norway's government announced this week it will attempt to purchase the 217-square-kilometer Austre Adventfjord property near Longyearbyen, one of two private land tracts in Svalbard. The announcement came after weeks of widespread reports a Chinese land tycoon planned to buy the land for a resort, although experts said he might be attempting to obtain the land for his country so it can establish a

strategic foothold in the Arctic.

"It is entirely natural and right that the state is committed to take over the property," said Monica Maeland, Norway's minister of Trade, Industry and Fisheries, in a prepared statement. Through public ownership and Norwegian law, we have the best starting point for managing Svalbard for the common good."

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Burning dilemma

New alarm system, closure of Classic Pizza keeping officials busier – and culprits paying for it

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

For people coming home from the pub or elsewhere in the wee hours of the morning, grabbing some fast food is no longer an option. Instead they're cooking at home which, combined with a new alarm system in wide use, is increasingly disrupting the sleep of Longyearbyen's firefighters.

There has been a small but noticeable increase in kitchen smoke and/or fire incidents this year – including three during a two-week timespan this month – compared to the same time last year, according to local fire and police officials. All of this month's incidents occurred during the early morning hours and the culprits in at least two were reportedly intoxicated.

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Per Kyrre Reymert, left, accepts the Tyfus award from Longyearbyen Mayor Christin Kristoffersen, center, and 2013 Tyfus winner Roger Ødegård during the Syttende Mai gala at Kulturhuset.

Born in a barn

Per Kyrre Reymert wins Tyfus for four decades of humble history

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

On a holiday celebrating a huge anniversary in Norway's history, it's fitting Longyearbyen's most-cherished citizen award went to a

historian celebrating his own landmark date.

Per Kyrre Reymert, 69, who has spent much of the past 40 years enriching locals and visitors with details about Svalbard's cultural

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Shadowing the almighty

New book seeks to be the supreme authority on the merciless history of Svalbard's polar bears and people

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

Like the subtlety of its seemingly savage and simple title, Birger Amundsen says his new book reveals a relationship between Svalbard's polar bears and people that is far more complex than commonly realized.

"Uten Nåde," which debuted last week, is the

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BIRGER AMUNDSEN

Birger Amundsen plays with an apparently orphaned polar bear cub at Edgeøya in 1989.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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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.

Better learn to quack like a duck



MORTEN EKKER / NORWEGIAN POLAR INSTITUTE

A flock of seabirds pass over rough waters in the Barents Sea, where ice has essentially disappeared during summers and been reduced by 40 percent in winter as temperatures have risen by 2.1 degrees Celsius during the past 30 years, according to a new report from researchers at the Norwegian Polar Institute. The report states Svalbard may have growing seasons similar to Copenhagen's within 85 years due to climate change, which will result in drastic ecosystem changes as polar species are replaced by Atlantic species. The two-part report (in English) is available at tinyurl.com/p73elry.

China not quite 'scuppered' yet

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While some English-language media such as the *Washington Post* are reporting Norway has "sunk" or "scuppered" China's efforts to buy the land, Maeland's statement merely notes "the Attorney General is in contact with the landowners' lawyer with the aim of finding a solution to this issue."

The property is owned by a Bergen industrialist Henning Horn and his two sisters, with the family announcing in April the land would be sold to the highest bidder. Family members and their legal representatives did not respond to Norway's offer by press time.

But they could encounter numerous obsta-

cles if they continue seeking foreign bids, such as Norway trying to enforce a 1938 "mischief" clause requiring the ministry's approval if the property is sold to a foreign entity.

The Austre Adventfjord property, represents 0.35 percent of Svalbard's total land mass, contains an estimated 20 million tons of coal that would be worth nearly 10 billion kroner at today's prices. Chinese tycoon Huang Nubo told NRK last week he was offering a bid of "more than" 24 million kroner with plans to turn the land into a "holiday village for the Chinese."

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

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

We're not marine engineers, which people should be thankful for for any number of reasons, but **our first thought when looking at this shot of the governor's new (and much delayed) boat was "what's wrong with this picture."** Not only does it seem absurdly top-heavy (ideal for any government bureaucracy), but we're guessing spirits might be a bit dampened if someone tries hosting a barbecue on the deck in waters like those in the picture above. Obviously people much smarter than us designed it to float and actually thrive in one of the world's harshest environments, which means we'll be spending a few obsessed hours after deadline Googling how the hell they did it ... Speaking of clueless editors, if you get a shrink-wrapped copy of Birger Amundsen's new book "Uten Nåde" make sure to take good care of the cover. **It seems somebody at the printing plant made a goof literally at the last second that deleted a couple of words.** It'll prob-



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It's a question of weight ratios: We're finding it hard to swallow the gov's new ship is designed for much tougher tasks than a three-hour tour.

ably never be as valuable as those stamps with upside-down airplanes, but since replacement covers have been put on nearly all of the copies we're seeing for sale now you never know ... And speaking of screw-ups, **we're giving our first-ever thumbs down to the entire town for failing to nominate anyone for this year's Youth Cultural Stipend** normally presented during the Syttende Mai gala. Harsh, we know, but is there anyone who actually believes those kids should be told none of them deserved it?



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Birger Amundsen, center, swaps polar bear tales with trappers Per Johnson, left, and Harald Soleim during the May 15 launch of the new book "Uten Nåde" at The University Centre in Svalbard.

Are bears, humans 'Without Mercy'?

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culmination of Amundsen's 40 years of encounters with the archipelago's most-famous animal. The simplest translation of the title is "Without Mercy," but the longtime journalist and long-ago Norwegian Polar Institute researcher said polar bears aren't the ruthless savages many people fear them to be.

"Each polar bear is an individual, but they're not aggressive," he said. "In general they're curious towards human beings."

Amundsen said the title has archaic, even religious, implications (one common interpretation is "without God's grace"). While books about Svalbard's polar bears are abundant – including Amundsen's youth-oriented "Isbjørnlandet" published in 1993 – he said his new two-kilogram tome explores the complete history of the relationship between bears and humans, where sustaining the life of one often means the death of the other.

"This is the such first book I've ever seen, and especially from the Norwegian side," he said. "It's not science. It's about polar bears and human beings."

Readers are hit with the brutal reality of that relationship as soon as they look at the cover, where hunter Erik Forfang's embrace of a polar bear cub known as "Bimbo" might appear cuddly until readers notice the blood and missing limb.



The unflinching portrayal continues throughout the book's 380 pages of text and its 300 unique photos. Amundsen, reflective of his long career as a journalist and documentary filmmaker, relies on a straightforward tone that allows the raw facts to speak for themselves.

"For me there's more drama in this clean-cut text than when you're overdoing it," he said.

Most of the book focuses on history, beginning with Amundsen trying to use his current-day knowledge to accurately update often "twisted" accounts of early expeditions. He also spent much of the past 10 years tracking down hunters and other long-ago settlers, profiling them in great detail.

But he said he feels the final section of the book, focusing on the five fatal polar bear attacks on humans since the animals became a protected species in Svalbard in 1973, is the most significant.

"The most interesting thing for me when writing this book was going into those five stories in depth to see what went wrong," he said.

Among the stories is the only interview with the survivor of a 1995 attack near Longyearbyen that killed Nina Jeanette Olaussen. Her companion, known only as Hilde, talked with Amundsen two years later, but he refrained from publishing the account until now.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM **SVALBARDPOSTEN** VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Rescue helicopter takes heart patient 1,200km to Tromsø

A rare and possibly unprecedented rescue using one of the Svalbard governor's helicopters occurred Sunday when a man who suffered a heart attack on a boat near Bjørnøya was flown about 1,200 kilometers to a hospital in Tromsø. Normally a patient would be flown by helicopter to Longyearbyen and then to Tromsø on an air ambulance sent from the mainland, but that was not a timely option. "It's a pretty long trip, but the doctor's assessment was that it was important to get him to the hospital as soon as possible," said Lt. Per Andreassen of the governor's office. "It shows that we have a pretty good range with the helicopters." The governor has a fuel depot at Bjørnøya, making the flight possible.

Study: Oil spills in Svalbard waters likely every six years

Oil spills in Svalbard's waters are likely to occur every six years as ship traffic in the area increases 30 percent during the next 15 years, according to an analysis conducted for the Norwegian Coastal Administration. The study by the foundation Det Norske Veritas states fishing vessels are dominant in Svalbard, representing 69 percent of traffic and sailing 1.45 million nautical miles annually. Cruise ships represent up to eight percent of traffic, but carry an average of three times as much fuel and spent most of their time near the coast. The west coast of Spitsbergen is considered the most vulnerable to spills, particularly the approach to Longyearbyen and Svea. The study also notes there were 48 accidents between 1998 and 2013, but the frequency has been increasing since 2005. Among the report's prevention recommendations are instructing cruise ships to sail in groups of two or more, designating zones where ships are required to sail with extra care and a dynamic ice monitoring process that allows adjustment required safety equipment ships must have aboard.

Gov. gets temporary ship

The *Tyr*, a temporary service vessel for the Svalbard's governor's office, arrived in Longyearbyen last Thursday. The Icelandic ship is filling in for the new *Polarsyssel*, whose delivery has been delayed until at least late August.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Rain/snow. NW winds to 55 km/h. High 2C (-6C wind chill), low -2C (-8C wind chill).	Cloudy. W winds to 42 km/h. High 2C (-3C wind chill), low -1C (-7C wind chill).	Mostly clear. Variable winds to 18 km/h. High 1C (-3C wind chill), low -1C (-4C wind chill).	Mostly clear. NE winds to 22 km/h. High -1C (-5C wind chill), low -3C (-7C wind chill).
24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight
Extended forecast: Sunday, clear, -1C (-6C), -3C (-8C), light 24:00h; Monday, clear, 1C (-2C), -2C (-5C), light 24:00h; Tuesday, cloudy, 1C (-3C), 1C (-3C), light 24:00h; Wednesday, cloudy, 2C (0C), 1C (-3C), light 24:00h			

Data provided by storm.no



A procession led by Svalbard Gov. Odd Olsen Ingerø, above at far right, and Russian Consulate General in Barentsburg Jurij Grikov, front at right, walks through the streets of Longyearbyen at midday May 17. At right, local students perform a circus act at Kulturhuset during a Syttende Mai gala celebrating the 200th anniversary of Norway's constitution. Photos by Mark Sabbatini / Icepeople.



Tyfus winner's start came in a pig barn

HISTORY, from page 1

history, was named the winner of this year's Tyfus award during the 200th anniversary celebration of Norwegian Constitution Day at Kulturhuset. During his acceptance speech, he noted his first trip to Longyearbyen was "during the 17th of May weekend 38 years ago."

"I was sent by the Tromsø Museum at the request of the museum committee in Longyearbyen to see whether the old pig barn could be used as a museum," he said.

The ironically named award, first presented in 1974, is given to a person judged to have done significant deeds to "keep us out of ty-

phus." Roger Ødegård, the city's cultural advisor and winner of last year's award, introduced this year's winner as someone who has made countless cultural contributions ranging from the museum's creation to offering walking tours of Longyearbyen's historical sites to playing Santa during celebrations of the winter holiday.

"The person has high skills, not only on the main lines of Svalbard's cultural history, but also detailed factual knowledge about both the people and different events that have taken place here," Ødegård said.

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

Eatery's closure puts heat on firefighters

SMOKE, from page 1

While the upgraded alarm system is a factor in the increased number of incidents, another significant cause is the closure of Classic Pizza last December, eliminating the last option for people wanting to buy something to eat in the early morning hours.

"Absolutely, we've noticed that a little bit," said Longyearbyen Fire Department Chief Jan Olav Sæter. "We hope Classic Pizza will find a place to open soon."

Other early-morning options at Huset and a red food truck outside of Karlsberger Pub have also disappeared in recent years.

Sam Ziaei, owner of Classic Pizza, said he is still hoping to reopen the restaurant – the only one that offered delivery – in the small hut now occupied by the Bruktikken thrift store. But city officials said they aren't likely to consider finding a new location for the thrift store until at least 2015 and Ziaei said he isn't interested in moving into another location even if it has established kitchen facilities.

"We want our own place," he said.

Some of the increase is due to the new direct-notification alarm system since "there are now about 350 more objects/properties that have a direct warning of fire," according to Sæter. The system, now in a majority of Longyearbyen's residences, is credited with possibly saving two homes in March when the occupant of a smoke-filled house was absent.

Although the system is designed to allow quicker responses by providing firefighters the exact address of alarms, it is also intended to reduce false alarms by giving occupants 45 seconds to enter a cancel code on a keypad before the emergency call center is notified.

Those found to be negligent in fire/smoke incidents face fines of nearly 11,000 kroner from the fire department and governor's office for a first offense. Sæter, in an e-mail, stated he doesn't believe the fines will deter homeowners from having the new alarm system installed it since "most people see enough value of such monitoring and notification."

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

What's up

May 21

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

May 24

Cultural exchange show in Barentsburg.

May 25

5 p.m.: Movie: "Bamse og Tyvenes By," Swedish children's film, all ages. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "X-Men: Days of Future Past" (3D), U.S. action/fantasy, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

May 27

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

May 28

6 p.m.: Movie: "X-Men: Days of Future Past," U.S. action/fantasy, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

May 31

6 p.m.: Cultural exchange show featuring performers from Barentsburg. Kulturhuset.

June 1

5 p.m.: Movie: "Natt Til 17," Norwegian youth drama. ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "Violette," French drama, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

June 2

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

June 10

Longyearbyen Day, with special activities and free admission to Svalbard Museum and Gallery Svalbard. Full schedule to be released later this month.

June 11

6 p.m.: Movie: "Edge of Tomorrow" (3D), U.S. action/sci-fi, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

June 15

8 p.m.: Movie: "A Million Ways To Die In The West," U.S. comedy/western, no age limit specified. 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:

- *Greenland's ice sheet in mad meltdown*
- *Climate threatens security, credit ratings*
- *Web film shows Inuit relocation atrocity*
- *Are climate change believers racist?*