

A gift of coal: Mine OK

Lunckefjell project gets approval from national ministries, Labor Party; extends local mining until 2023

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

Some assembly is still required, but Longyearbyen's economy just got exactly what it wanted for Christmas.

A new coal mine at Lunckefjell may have just cleared its most significant remaining hur-

dles as Norway's environmental and industry ministries, plus the ruling Labor Party, endorsed the project this week.

The mine still needs approval from Parliament, with a vote expected next year. Strong objections, largely environmental, remain among some politicians and organizations.

But the ministries' approval halted talk by Store Norske about ceasing mining operations in the near future due to diminishing supplies at Svea. The company produced 1.9 million tons of coal last year, far less than half the total four years ago.

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Following yonder dart north

Two Canadians to perform 10 days of Svalbard stunts to help bears after blindfold toss at map

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

"Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" when performing acts of charity is one of the chestnuts of a famous guy whose birthday is being celebrated a few days.

That's not exactly what Matt Cook and Sorin Mihailovici are doing, but close enough. The Edmonton men are on their way to Svalbard this week after a dart tossed blindfolded

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'Let them sing praises'



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Hundreds of listeners overflow the chapel into the reception area during a Christmas concert by various local musicians Sunday at Svalbard Church.

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Not keeping watch over their clock

Man, dog spending a month in snow hole to study effects of a long polar night without time

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

Marcel Schütz won't be up at 3 a.m. Christmas Day hoping to sneak an early glimpse at what Santa brought. Or maybe he will be – he'll have no way of knowing.

What's certain is there won't be any stockings, fireplace, tree or companionship beyond a dog as he begins a month of living in a snow hole far from Longyearbyen without knowing the time. Also, while Santa knows if he's been

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COURTESY OF MARCEL SCHÜTZ

Marcel Schütz, heading out on an expedition, is spending Christmas far from home – any home.

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.



Sorin Mihailovici, at left, throws a dart at a map of the world while blindfolded Oct. 31 in Edmonton in this video by polarfaith.com. Mihailovici and Matt Cook, above right, will spend 10 days in Svalbard beginning late this week to raise funds to benefit polar bears after a toss actually hitting the map landed closest to the archipelago.

Dart guys offer donors hugs, TV ads

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at a map of the world landed closest to the archipelago. They vowed to travel to and aid the people wherever the dart hit, but in Svalbard will focus on the plight of the polar bears due to climate change.

"We had to fudge it a bit, so we picked polar bears because there are more of them than people," Cook told the *Toronto Star*.

The pair will raise money by performing various activities for sponsors ranging from virtual hugs (any donation amount) to a package featuring a 15-second TV commercial and numerous other items (\$1,000).

The goal is to give five dollars to each of the world's estimated 20,000 polar bears, although not necessarily in direct cash.

The fateful toss took place Oct. 31, with Mihailovici and Cook throwing darts while blindfolded until each hit a world map. They then determined which of the locations to visit.

After repeated throws by both, the darts landed closest to Svalbard and the beach resort haven of Azores.

Details about the project are available at www.polarfaith.com.

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

Letter to the editor

Don't be another idiot

Re: "Bear broadcast is BBC buffoonery" (Dec. 13):

Please, don't get into the idiocy of some of the British press about Attenborough's use of a zoo polar bear mother and her cubs. Have you actually seen the footage? Do you know that the reason this was even known was that the BBC's own website for the series explained this? Do you realize that ALL wildlife documentaries use "doubles" etc. because they're attempting to convey something about a partic-

ularly creature or habitat and the animals tend not to be members of Equity (i.e. aren't actors)?

The only reason Attenborough is under attack, it seems, is because the final episode of the series was directly about global warming. It's those who want to deny the reality of the human activities behind at least some of global warming who are keen to discredit Attenborough's scientifically clear and accurate explanation of it.

Alice Bondi
UK

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

There's no shortage of bizarre theories about local climate research, the true purpose of the seed vault and so on, but this year-ender makes a strong case for the top *non compos mentis* of 2011. A rant titled "The exact formula for writing Alvin and the Chipmunks: Chip-Wrecked" recruits "the expertise of Professor Horus X. Lomax, Vice-Director of Cultural Preservation at the Svalbard Dross Vault, the sister organization of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault." Apparently the doctor and his team worked "to preserve all of the world's pop cultural detritus in a bunker in the Soviet ghost city of Pyramiden. The SDV cherry-picks civilization's most execrable entertainment products in hopes of warning future generations

about the dangers cultural artifacts – like say, Supertrain – can inflict on the human psyche." The whole dissertation is at <http://io9.com/5869026/the-sociological-formula-for-alvin-and-the-chipmunks-chip+wrecked> ... The Russians haven't exactly been the good guys in the news lately – threatening to shoot local coast guard inspectors, building illegal things here, etc. – so at this time of peace and goodwill they deserve major kudos for assisting some Arctic neighbors in dire need on the other side of the world. Residents in Nome, Alaska, were facing a massive winter fuel crisis as an early freeze blocked the U.S. ships normally making such deliveries, but Russia is coming to the rescue at the end of this month with one of their icebreakers.



COURTESY OF MARCEL SCHÜTZ

Marcel Schütz gets ready to depart for a remote snow-hole camp with "Rambo," the sled dog accompanying him, where Schütz will spend a month being monitored by a researcher far away to see how isolation from people and any indication of time affects his habits during the polar night.

Holiday trip is truly timeless

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naughty or nice, a scientist abroad will know if his behavior is normal or nutty by tracking his movement via a satellite transmitter attached to his ankle.

"The project is just to see what people are like without any clock," he said of the expedition he calls "Psychologia Experimentum II."

Schütz, a resident of Bern, Switzerland, now living in Svalbard, said he didn't pick the timing that sets his departure for this week, "but it's actually for me a very special experience to be out during the holidays and not know it's Christmas."

Accompanying him is a sled dog, "Rambo," who will help haul about 200 kilograms of equipment and supplies to the expedition site about 30 kilometers from town. The dog will not be fitted with a movement tracker.

Numerous studies about the effects of continual darkness and time isolation have been conducted, including one published earlier this year indicating the efficiency of Store Norske miners were not impacted by prolonged darkness in the underground mine at Svea.

But Schütz said he's not aware of a similar single-person polar isolation study, with the closest being three people in Antarctica who had a clock during their expedition.

Schütz doesn't plan to completely seal himself off from the world, saying he will explore his surroundings during his trip. He said he isn't concerned about chance encounters with others ruining the study.

"If I encounter other people it's darkness and very hard to see," he said. "I will go where not too many people are."

Also, while twilight will return to the area later in January, Schütz said he doesn't expect it to seriously affect the data collected by the distant researcher, who he is declining to name until the expedition is complete.

As for diversions in camp, Schütz said he is limiting himself to three books.

Schütz said he expects the biggest challenge will be in January when weather and snow cover may limit the potential for outdoor activities.

"In January you have special conditions, that are not the best conditions," he said. "I think the mind will be a big factor because you're alone. I have just the dog with me."

As for predicting how might behave compared to normal during the next month, "I don't do that forwarding," he said. "I'll let everything come to me."

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Svalbard's elevation rising due to ice melt from warming

Svalbard is on the rise – literally – as changing ice mass in the area is causing the land to rise at the most rapid rate in 150 years, according to the Norwegian Mapping Authority. Measurements in Ny-Ålesund show the land is rising about 8.5 millimeters a year. The fastest rate measured in the mainland is 7.7 millimeters in Trysil. "This is the result of climate change after the Little Ice Age," said Halfdan Pascal Kierulf, a mapping authority researcher, referring to a period of freezing in Svalbard around 1870. Svalbard's elevation varies considerably from year to year due to glacier activity, with earlier methods of measuring the change often underestimating the shift. New gravity-based measurements are providing more accurate readings and the mapping authority is seeking to upgrade the geodetic observatory in Ny-Ålesund.

EU weight rules may keep air ambulances away in storms

Ambulance aircraft may not be able to reach Svalbard during difficult weather conditions under weight regulations imposed by the European Union, according to Norwegian health officials. "I think this is a matter that should be solved with an exemption," said Jan Norum, director of Health North, in an interview with NRK. The regulations prevent aircraft from completely filling fuel tanks during poor weather, which may not give them enough to reach Svalbard from the mainland.

Flight to North Pole by Libya denied refueling in Svalbard

The new government of Libya is hoping to fly to the North Pole and plant its flag there next spring, but the expedition is in question because Svalbard's governor is stating the aircraft cannot land here to refuel. Svalbard regulations prohibit sightseeing flights and the Libyan expedition appears to violate that rule, said Guri Tveito, the governor's chief environmental officer. Sam Rutherford, manager of a Belgian company handling the flight's logistics, said the Svalbard stop is for practical reasons only and is appealing the decision to the Norwegian government.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly cloudy. S winds to 15 km/h. High -7C (-12C wind chill), low -11C (-18C wind chill).	Snow late. SE winds to 39 km/h. High -6C (-16C wind chill), low -12C (-23C wind chill).	Snow. E winds to 25 km/h. High -7C (-13C wind chill), low -11C (-18C wind chill).	Snow. E winds to 29 km/h. High -4C (-11C wind chill), low -5C (-12C wind chill).
Sunrise 0:00; sunset 0:00	Sunrise 0:00; sunset 0:00	Sunrise 0:00; sunset 0:00	Sunrise 0:00; sunset 0:00
Extended forecast: Sunday, snow, -5C (-11C), -5C (-12C), light 0:00h; Monday, snow, -6C (-13C), -8C (-16C), light 0:00h; Tuesday, snow ending, -10C (-19C), -20C (-30C), light 0:00h; Wednesday, cloudy, -20C (-30C), -22C (-30C), light 0:00h			
Data provided by yr.no			



MALTE JOCHMANN / STORE NOROSKE

This hillside at Lunckefjell, northeast of the existing coal mine at Svea, is where Store Norske hopes to open a new mine in 2013. The company estimates the site contains eight million tons of coal.

Lunckefjell gets key endorsements

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"We have been waiting for this decision, so this is really a great entry on Christmas and New Year for us," said Bjørn Arnestad, Store Norske's administrative director, in a prepared statement. "Lunckefjell is a very good project, which has been prepared, impact assessed and approved under the strictest environmental protection law in the world, and it is economically sustainable."

The ministries endorsement also backs continuing coal mining in Svalbard until at least 2023. But strict conditions are also being imposed to minimize the environmental impact and restore the area afterward.

The company must develop a plan for the prevention of natural and terrain damage before construction begins at Lunckefjell. Detailed restoration plans, including financial guarantees, must also be presented.

Nearly all production at Lunckefjell is expected from 2014 to 2018, with restoration ef-

orts beginning in 2019. The environmental ministry, in a statement, noted the site is nearly vegetation-free and greenhouse gas emissions are unlikely to increase at Lunckefjell compared to current operations at Svea.

The Labor Party backing recognizes Svalbard's economy "has three legs to stand on: coal, tourism and research," said Ingrid Heggø, a member of the party's central board, in an interview with *VG*.

The endorsement was quickly denounced by opponents concerned about the potential environmental impacts. Lars Haltbrekken, chairman of Norway's chapter of Friends of the Earth, also accused the party of hypocrisy in an interview with *VG*, noting Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg champions carbon emission cuts to fight climate change while back coal mining operations in Svalbard and a coal-fired power plant exempt from punitive emissions fees.

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

Briefly

Waste plant powder still a mystery, but harmless

A mysterious purple powder that spread throughout Longyearbyen's waste-processing plant, resulting in scaled-back operations in recent weeks, remains unidentified but is apparently not dangerous, officials said.

"We have been told that when the powder interacts with water it is harmless," a statement from Bydrift, the agency operating the plant, notes. "Over the New Year the waste plant will be washed down. Once this is done the waste facility will be fully operational."

Governor halts rabies traps, restrictions remain

The governor is halting the trapping and killing of foxes in the Longyearbyen area that started in early fall due to an outbreak of rabies. But strict preventative measures, including prohibiting dogs to be outside un-

leashed or without human supervision, remain in effect.

Twelve foxes were captured and removed by the Norwegian Polar Institute for analysis, but it appears there are no more in the area at present, according to a statement from the governor's office. Officials have stated previously the problem may resurface when warm weather returns.

New geodesy antenna OK'd for Ny-Ålesund

A new geodesy antenna in Ny-Ålesund costing 219 million kroner has received approval from Norway's environmental ministry, which officials at the research station say is desperately needed to replace the existing antenna and provide more accurate climate data.

The new facility, which will take five years to complete, maps Earth's rotation and movement in space. Readings help track climate, sea levels, earthquakes and other information.

What's up

Dec. 21

6 p.m.: Movie: "Tower Heist," U.S. action/comedy, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 24

2 and 4 p.m.: Christmas Eve Mass services. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 25

Noon: Christmas Mass. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 26

6 p.m.: Movie: "Alvin and the Chipmunks 3," U.S. animation/comedy, all ages. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Sherlock Holmes; A Game of Shadows," U.S. action/adventure, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 27

6 p.m.: Family Christmas party. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 28

6 p.m.: Movie: "Happy Feet 2," U.S. animation/family, all ages. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 31

Power meter readings for fourth quarter of 2011 due.

Jan. 1

8 p.m.: Movie: "The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo," U.S. drama/thriller, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

Jan. 4

6 p.m.: Movie: "Varg Veum," Danish/Norwegian crime/thriller, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

Jan. 7

7:30 p.m.: Concert featuring Elizabeth Norberg-Schulz. Opera and classical works including Schumann, Puccini and Bellini. Kulturhuset.

Jan. 8

6 p.m.: Movie: "Hysteria," British comedy/romance, all ages. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Meeting in Tuscany," British/French romance, all ages. 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:

- *Russian vessel stranded in Antarctica*
- *Drilling rig tragedy in Russia kills workers*
- *Reindeer meat protest leads to big sales*
- *Polar bear prison opens in Canada*