



AT THE FRONT AND REAR OF THE COMMUNICATIONS CUTTING EDGE

Still going postal...

Longyearbyen to keep one of Norway's few remaining post offices due to unique functions

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Call it the hopelessly old-fashioned way of always pushing the envelope.

Longyearbyen's post office is slated to be one of only 30 remaining in Norway by 2014 as the country continues the near elimination of the 2,400 facilities it had 17 years ago. Norwegian residents are increasingly using postal counters in retail establishments like supermarkets if they send traditional mail at all, but officials say unique aspects Svalbard mean a dedicated post office is a necessity.

"This is not only a post office as on the mainland," said Oddny Slatlem, supervisor of the Longyearbyen post office. "We also have to bring mail to homes, and transport mail to and from the plane."

Slatlem said there was no indication the
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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Helge Ask, right, helps a customer at the Longyearbyen post office, where renovations to the counter space and other areas designed to improve efficiency were completed last week.

...but don't call us wired

Telenor pulls the plug on entire traditional phone network, starting with Svalbard in 2013

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Talk about being on the cutting edge, quite literally.

Svalbard will be Norway's first location where all traditional phone service is snipped, with the last wires cut by the end of next year, according to Telenor. The elimination of the

copper wire network, to be replaced fully with broadband and mobile service, is part of the telecommunication company's plan to phase out all traditional lines by 2017.

"Svalbard is a technological showcase," said Frode Støldal, Telenor's technology director, in an interview published today by *Dagens IT*.

The archipelago was also the launch point for the company's 4G network in May of 2011, but only at a few limited test locations. Customer access is expected later this year.

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Cruise tourists sprout like weeds



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Tourists from one of the first large cruise ships stopping in Longyearbyen this year explore the center of town today.

Thousands arrive to sow their economic seeds, hopefully not on a crusade to plant real ones

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Among the ten commandments for Svalbard worshippers arriving this week on the first large cruise ships of the season is "thou shall not pick plants." There's nothing about sowing them, although it may need inscription to weed out misguided efforts to save the planet.

A second group of polar cruise ship tourists – at the other end of the globe – has been caught planting seeds as part of what they call a

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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.



DENNIS BROMAGE

A polar bear and her two cubs drift on an ice floe far from land in Svalbard. Observers described the bears as looking lost, with the mother uncertain if her cubs could swim far enough to more stable ice.

Starving polar bears? Oh, well...

Mother and cubs stranded on Svalbard ice floe lack sympathy from climate change skeptics

By MARK SABBATINI

Editor

Maybe it'd more effective showing them alongside the infamous recent photo of a mother cannibalizing her cub on the ice.

A collection of photos showing a polar bear and her two cubs stranded on an ice floe in Svalbard is getting lots of news and blog coverage, but a largely chilly reaction at the suggestion their plight is due to climate change. Granted, bloggers and reader comments aren't always indicative of mainstream thinking, but they frequently horde such conversations.

The animals were captured on film about 100 kilometers from the coast of Spitsbergen

by Dennis Bromage, who told the *Daily Mail* of London the "baffled bears just stared into the water as if to say, 'where did all the ice go?'"

"If forced ashore, they will starve for the summer because there is just nothing for them to eat," he said in an article published today. "The ice is breaking up earlier and earlier every year. But the bears will cling on to the ice for as long as they can."

The story has a happy ending for the bears as they were finally able to swim to more stable ice. But not everybody was cheering.

"Why the drama attached to what is an every year situation for polar bears?" wrote "Ian" of North Lanarkshire in the comments section. Another "most-recommended post" declared "the warmers are restless."

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

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

With the summer tourism season in full swing we were thinking of offering a few tips for the thrifty, especially since a *New York Times* travel writer is basically crowdsourcing a Scandinavian vacation based on frugality advice he gets. Never mind the whole thing may be a tough sell to his readers since, as one Norseman put it, "many people in the U.S. conclude that Norway is some sort of Nordic socialist North Korean gulag where people huddle together starving in miserable hovels." But it turns out somebody beat us on the cheap beat, with Alex Robertson Textor of Gadling (a site sponsored by AOL, which incomprehensibly is still around) publishing his tips for Svalbard this week. We can't quibble with much of his advice, starting with "first of all, don't discount the truly exotic, exciting things that are absolutely free to observe: the landscape; wandering reindeer, wary but clearly not terrified of humans; the cultural center Kulturhuset; the gallery and art and handicrafts center in Nybyen; and the remains of earlier mining activi-

ties strewn about Longyearbyen." Among the other suggestions getting our approval are staying at Gjestehuset 102 or Mary Ann's Polarrigg if you want a roof, the campground if you're cool with tents, and getting most of your food at Svalbardbutikken. We balk a bit at the never-ending claim that Huset is the town's best restaurant, especially if you're going for the early evening buffet Textor recommends. We're also iffy on the taxi tours and would feel better about his ice cave recommendation if they weren't offered "before winter and well into the spring," making it rather moot for the summer crowd. But he gets the gold star of approval for his final item: "Drink beer. This won't actually save you money, but it's surprising and noteworthy how cheap alcoholic drinks are on Svalbard." He did miss some of our *real* insider advice (some of which is kinda shady) for things like free food and shelter, but we gotta mention souvenir hunting at Bruktikken, where everything is free if you happen to wander into the obscure hut when it's open Tuesdays and Saturdays.

If you really want to 'be a local' for a day...



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Residents drop off Christmas trees, old dogsleds and other trash at Longyearbyen's waste disposal facility during last year's annual community clean-up. This year's clean-up is Friday and Saturday, with the waste facility open and accepting residential discards from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Pickups are also available by calling 4819 2370 on Friday and 4827 6183 on Saturday, and trash in proper bags (available free at Svalbardbutikken) can be left along roadsides for collection. A shoreline cleanup is scheduled beginning at the Svalbard Sailing Club at noon. Those picking up trash who think they may have discovered a cultural relic are asked to call Irene at 9096 1598.

Tourists bring plants, on purpose or not

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religious and environmental mission. There's no evidence of any such attempts or plans for Svalbard, although officials say climate change is making the area's ecosystem increasingly vulnerable to invasive species brought deliberately, accidentally or by nature itself.

The most recent Antarctic incident involved two people from a gospel group hiking on Deception Island during a cruise stop, according to the Uruguay news agency Merco-Press. They were caught sowing barley seeds and officials, after stern warnings, dug up the seeds and kept close watch on the group for the remainder of the cruise.

A similar act occurred nine years ago on the same island.

"We scattered and released the seeds of the harvest of souls to be saved," wrote Mary Craig, an evangelist from the U.S., on her website at the time. "We understood that we were planting seeds that would sprout as others

came to water and plant the church of Christ."

Barley is a highly adaptable crop that grows as far north as the Arctic Circle, but that could change since other plant and animal species are being increasingly discovered in Svalbard as climate change takes effect.

Sibling mice have persisted since being discovered in the 1960s and Russians apparently planted non-native flora in Pyramiden that "probably is dependent on the fertile soil and wouldn't grow anywhere else," said Guri Tveito, head of environmental protection for the governor's office. She said such incidents occurred before passage of the Svalbard Environmental Protection Act in 2002, which bans deliberate introduction of non-native species.

But studies during the past two years show tourists frequently bring alien seeds unknowingly in their shoes and the risk of such species taking root is likely to increase significantly.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Ivar Undheim likely leaving as city manager for old job

Longyearbyen City Manager Ivar Undheim will apparently be returning to his old job with the same title in Klepp, with the municipal council there scheduled to vote on the recommendation Monday. Undheim, 57, who came to Longyearbyen in 2009 after serving as Klepp's manager since 1987, said the work here is "exciting" and different than expected. "Among other things, there is far greater national attention to Svalbard than municipalities on the mainland," he said. He originally said he hoped to end his career in Svalbard, but the decision to return to Klepp is "the sum of several things, including my family situation and the fact that we have a cabin nearby. Besides, the fourth winter in Svalbard is not as exciting as the first two." Klepp hopes Undheim will return to his job by next January and Longyearbyen officials said they will try to have a new manager by next March.

Tight economy forces Store Norske to delay new coal pier

Tight economic times are forcing Store Norske to indefinitely postpone construction of a new coal-loading pier at Hotellneset. A new quay was scheduled for completion by fall, necessitated by the collapse of a coal loading tower on the pier during a storm last March, but the company will rely on temporary repairs and restricted operations until the new project is possible.

Council member wants halt to cell phones at meetings

A request that mobile phones be turned off during Longyearbyen Municipal Council meetings will be brought up during the group's next gathering June 19, said member Kristin Grøtting. "I think it's not OK that people are not present during meetings with their head," she said. "I remember one who left the meeting while the matter was treated and then came back and gave a presentation after the matter was closed. Such behavior is terribly annoying." She said she understands people who are on-call for emergencies must keep their phones on, but will ask Council Chair Christin Kristoffersen to silence other phones.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy. SE winds to 11 km/h. High 2C (-1C wind chill), low 1C (-2C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. E winds to 15 km/h. High 2C (-1C wind chill), low 0C (-4C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. NE winds to 11 km/h. High 1C (1C wind chill), low -1C (-5C wind chill).	Cloudy. Variable winds at 3 km/h. High 1C (0C wind chill), low 0C (0C wind chill).
24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight
Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, 1C (-1C), 0C (-2C), light 24:00h; Monday, cloudy, 1C (-1C), 0C (-2C), light 24:00h; Tuesday, cloudy, 1C (-1C), 0C (-2C), light 24:00h; Wednesday, p. cloudy, 1C (-1C), 0C (-2C), light 24:00h			

Data provided by yr.no

Still feeling frisky at 106



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Residents and visitors gather Sunday at the Svalbard Museum to cut the cake in observance of Longyear Day, celebrating the founding of Longyearbyen in 1906 by U.S. mining developer John Munroe Longyear. The day featured performances by visiting musicians, a gymnastics exhibition by Sirkus Svalnardo, a historic walking tour guided by community leaders, and a lecture and video presentation of Svalbard by photographer Marcela Cardenas. Longyear came to Svalbard in 1901 and bought the Tronhjem Spitsbergen Kulkompani in 1904, which Store Norske acquired with other holdings when it was founded in 1916.

Post office upgraded as others close

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post office would be included in the most recent round of closures announced today by Posten Norge. A total of 149 of the remaining 179 dedicated facilities will be shut down, affecting about 1,000 employees.

Seven of the remaining post offices will be in Oslo, with Troms, Rogaland, Oslo and Akershus the only counties to retain more than one, according to a press release from the agency.

The volume of traditional mail is dropping sharply due to electronic alternatives like e-mail and internet banking, the release notes. Also, the counters at retail stores are open at

more convenient hours for many residents.

But Svalbard continues to process an exceptionally high ratio of parcels compared to the mainland since other means are limited, Slatlem said. Indeed, instead of cutting back, Longyearbyen received new delivery trucks last year and an upgrade of the post office itself was completed last week.

"We have so many parcels we have to have bigger cars," she said.

She said the new counter space is more modern and allows more efficient movement.

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

Traditional network out, but 4G coming

LANDLINE, from page 1

Telenor is now conducting pilot tests for its phone network phaseout using Svalbard as a research lab since all customers already have the newer fiber-optic network installed, according to company statements. Residents wanting to use traditional "wired" phones instead of mobile ones will be able to do so, but only using the broadband network.

Telenor started building its copper wire network in Norway 110 years ago and last year threw a gala party to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the first telegraph station in Svalbard. But use of the network is dropping sharply, according to statements by Telenor officials, with revenues dropping 20 percent during the past two years, and between 20,000 and 25,000 customers abandoning traditional service each quarter for cheaper alternatives.

The transition poses numerous challenges

for Telenor, but largely on the mainland where competitors have already established fiber-optic networks. Meanwhile, the copper network is in buildings scattered throughout cities like Oslo and sometimes extends several kilometers in remote areas to reach a single residence.

"We need to (eliminate) 1,000 lines a day if it will take four years," said Arne Quist Christensen, head of Telenor's modernization effort, according to *Dagens IT*.

But the number of Norwegians with access to high-speed communications is high, with 90 percent of Telenor's customers expected to have 3G coverage by the end of the year, according to a company press statement. The 4G network is being launched in eight cities besides Longyearbyen, including Oslo, Bærum, Sandvika, Bergen, Trondheim and Sandnes.

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

What's up

June 13

6 p.m.: Movie: "Snow White and the Huntsmen," U.S. action/drama, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Public meeting on urban initiatives in Longyearbyen. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

June 14

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

6 p.m.: Bydrift Board meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

June 15

Noon: Liturgy of the conference of all Norwegian bishops with Bishop Kjølås presiding. Music by Polargospel and the Svalbard Kirkes Trio. Svalbard Church.

7 p.m.: Midnight Blues Cruise to Barentsburg, featuring concert by Yngve & His Boogie Legs. Returns to Longyearbyen at 1 a.m. June 16. Details and tickets at www.svalbardblues.com.

June 16

10 p.m. (est.): Concert by Yngve & His Boogie Legs. Barentz Pub.

June 17

6 p.m.: Movie: "LOL," U.S. comedy, all ages. Kulturhuset.

June 19

7 p.m.: Longyearbyen Municipal Council meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

June 20

8 p.m.: Movie: "LOL," U.S. comedy, all ages. Kulturhuset.

June 22

7 p.m.: Free concert by the Keystone State Boychoir. Kulturhuset.

July 1

Q2 meter reading due.

July 1 - August 5

Movie theater at Kulturhuset closed for renovations.

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 melt gives shippers record savings*
- *Aerosmith ready for global warming tour*
- *Did climate change kill off life on Mars?*
- *Sexual depravity of 'hooligan' penguins*