



Sunny days in Svalbard again

The day, truth be told, wasn't all that different.

The skies were overcast and Longyearbyen was already getting more than 12 hours a day of "twilight," exceeding the sunrise/sunset duration in New York City. Even during a mass gathering at the penultimate moment of the first dawn after a four-month polar night, a scattering of people said they didn't feel a magic transformation.

"Maybe if the sun had come out," said Kate Johansen, hoisting her daughter, Benedicte, 3, one of the dozens of children wearing a plush circle of cloth sun rays around her neck.

But there's little doubt the crowd was in a celebratory mood that lasted throughout a week as a record attendance of more than 4,000 was tallied at concerts, theater performances, presentations, sledge races and other activities during the annual Solfestuka festival. Be it the dark, cold, desolation or other demons of winter, most people said there's something to look forward to the end of as summer approaches.

"There's a lot of wind in the winter," said Hanna Hays, 11, who performed a Thai dance with three friends during the festival's annual youth talent show.

It took a few days for the skies to clear and the sun to actually shine on Longyearbyen (just after 1 p.m. on March 13 is when the first rays hit the walkway in the town center). But by the



The Polargospel children's choir sings on the step of the old hospital building during the opening of Solfestuka on March 8. The sun, which locals say first shines on the step after the four-month polar night, remained behind the clouds all day.

end of the week dawn was approaching before 5 a.m. and the last dusk vanishing after 8 p.m. as the light returns faster than nearly anywhere else on Earth. Constant daylight will return

well before the "midnight sun" rises from April 19 to Aug. 24.

The darkness can cause depression, sleep
See SUN, page 2

Inside

Review: Tromsø Kunstforsyning, *Tur*
page 4

Events calendar
page 4

Weather forecast
page 3

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English translations of these and other pillaged articles (OK, we owe them many thanks for allowing this) are at www.icepeople.net.

Airship museum takes flight

Couple seeks to tell full story of overlooked trio of expeditions from Svalbard to North Pole

As planetary conquests go, it wasn't anybody's finest hour.

The first successful flight over the North Pole came to an abrupt end when bad weather forced a trio of legendary explorers to land their airship well short of their intended destination of Paris. They brought their airship down in a tiny village in northern Alaska where the Inuit people greeted the strange object from the sky with indifference.

The locals then foiled recovery plans by stripping the aircraft for parts, leaving the explorers to quarrel in the world press about whose country deserved credit for the pole flyer. The feud resulted in one of them setting out as the sole leader of a subsequent flight that crashed, leading to his arrest and public disgrace after numerous people died in



Ingunn Løyning, left, and Stefano Poli examine a diary from a polar expedition featured at their new Spitsbergen Airship Museum.

the rescue operation – including another leader of the original journey.

Perhaps it's not surprising those close to the incident consider it an ill-documented and

See AIRSHIP, page 3

