



*A few texts & many pictures about my
Voyage to
Svalbard Island -- north of Norway
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INTRODUCTION SVALBARD

svalbard is a set of islands in the arctic ocean, governed by norway. they were possibly discovered by the vikings in the 12th century, and certainly 1596 by the dutch sailor barents. this archipelago is located halfway between northern norway and the northpole. the main island is spitsbergen, where the only villages are situated, longyearbyen, founded in 1908 as coal mining settlement and now svalbard's capital, barentsburg, a russian mining town, founded in 1920, and ny-alesund, founded in 1917, at first for coal-mining, the most northerly settlement in the world, now a research town.



since 1600, a lot of hunting took place in spitsbergen, including whales, polar bears and foxes. meanwhile this has almost completely stopped. coal mining,

dominating for about 100 years, is maintained on a small scale. however, pyramiden and sveagruva - the only full-scale coal mining place - have no permanent inhabitants anymore.



the svalbard islands are located north of the arctic circle, which means that they experience midnight sun in summer (no sun set) and polar night in winter.

there are thousands and thousands of animals on all islands - on land, in the water, in the air. this includes the both famous and feared polar bear, the 'iconic' symbol of svalbard.



while hunting and mining (except of sveagruba) have mostly ended, svalbard and especially its core island, spitsbergen, have become a significant target of tourism, mostly by ship, and centered in longyearbyen. nevertheless, besides the polar bear, mining is still an essential symbol in spitsbergen.



SPITSBERGEN HABITATS AND CREATURES

the main town in spitsbergen is longyearbyen, its center, originally a mining place. the only other flourishing town is ny alesund, in the north-west.





linked to earlier centuries, quite a few abandoned historic dwellings can be found inland.

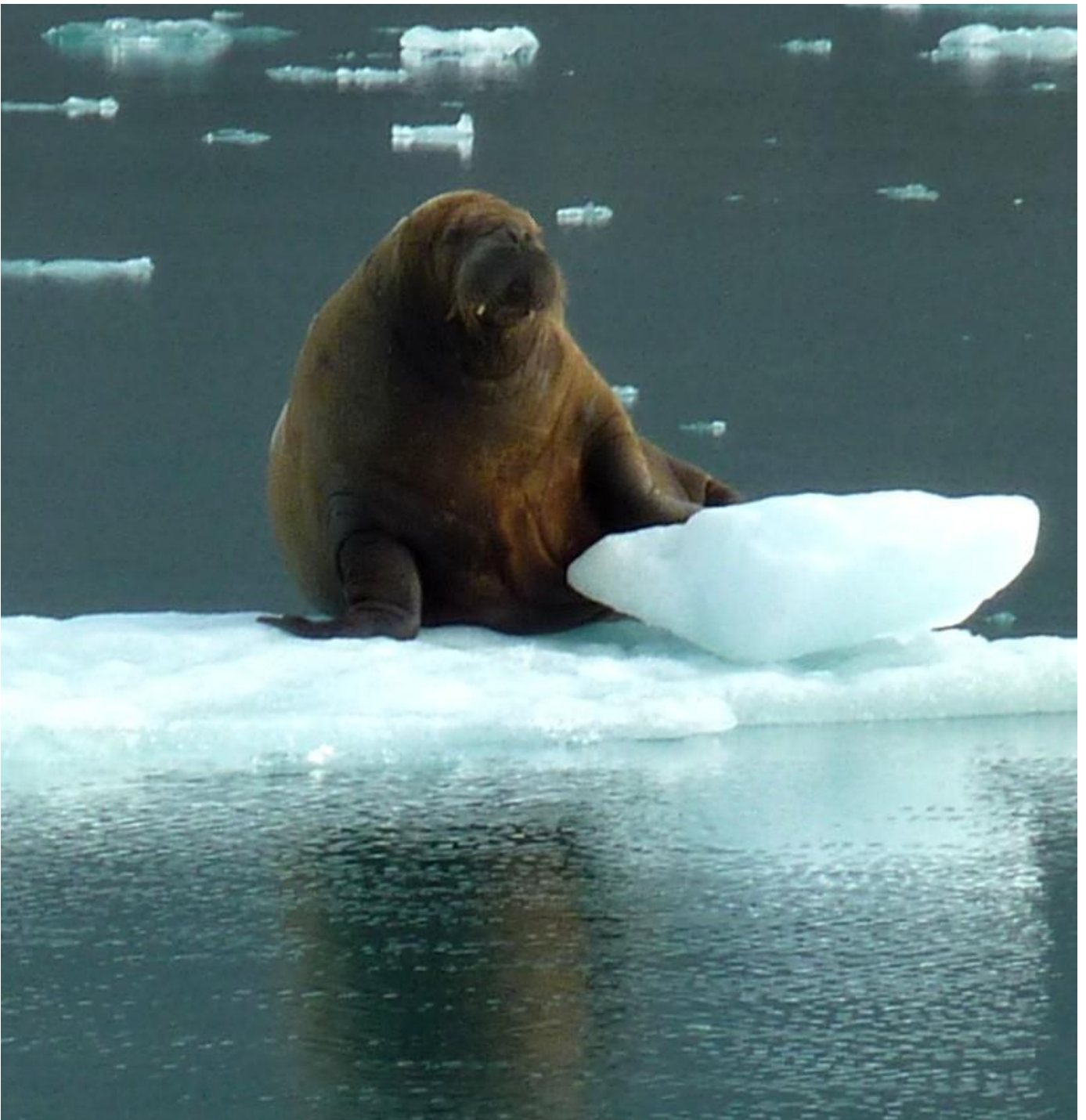


there are countless animals in all svalbard islands, in the sea, in the air, and on land . familiar and quite common are rendeirs (mostly wild ones), and foxes.



at the coast of all svalbard islands, colonies of walrusses, who are very social animals, can be seen. they are hunting in the sea, yet lazy when not hungry.





there are thousands of polar bears , especially on spitsbergen. they are protected yet dangerous.



anywhere in svalbard there are birds birds birds - - on land and even more so countless sea birds.



in northern spitsbergen is a configuration of high vertical rocks right in the ocean. these rocks are seen as safe nesting places by huge numbers of birds.







amusingly, some birds also rest on little icebergs - - may be they are at times just a bit languid?



at the end of the segment about birds -- the by far cutest sea birds - yet actually hard to see in autumn - are the puffins.



finally, regarding the (in)famous polar bears - given how hazardous they can be, all visitor guides are obliged to carry a rifle when outside town!



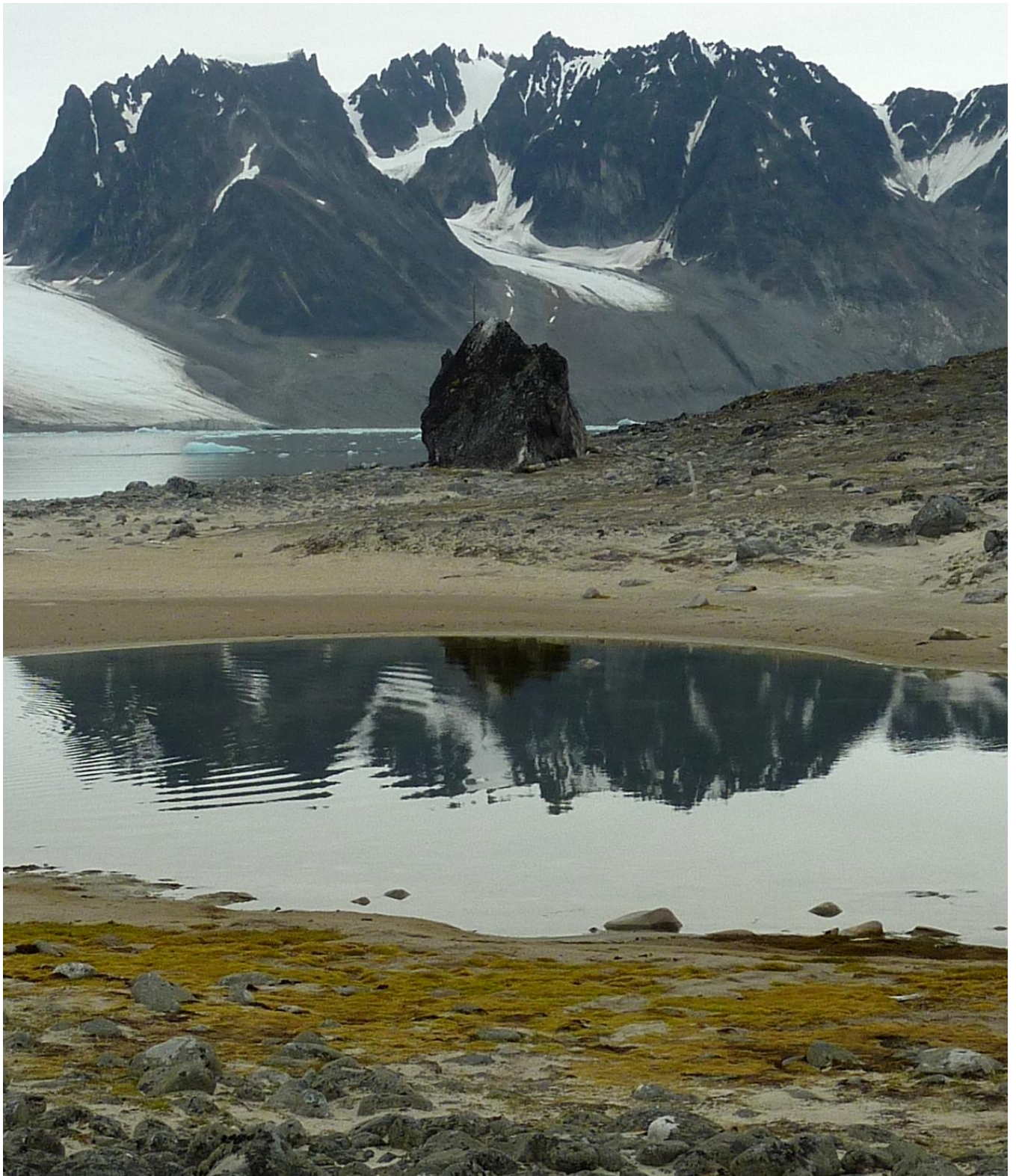
LANDSCAPES

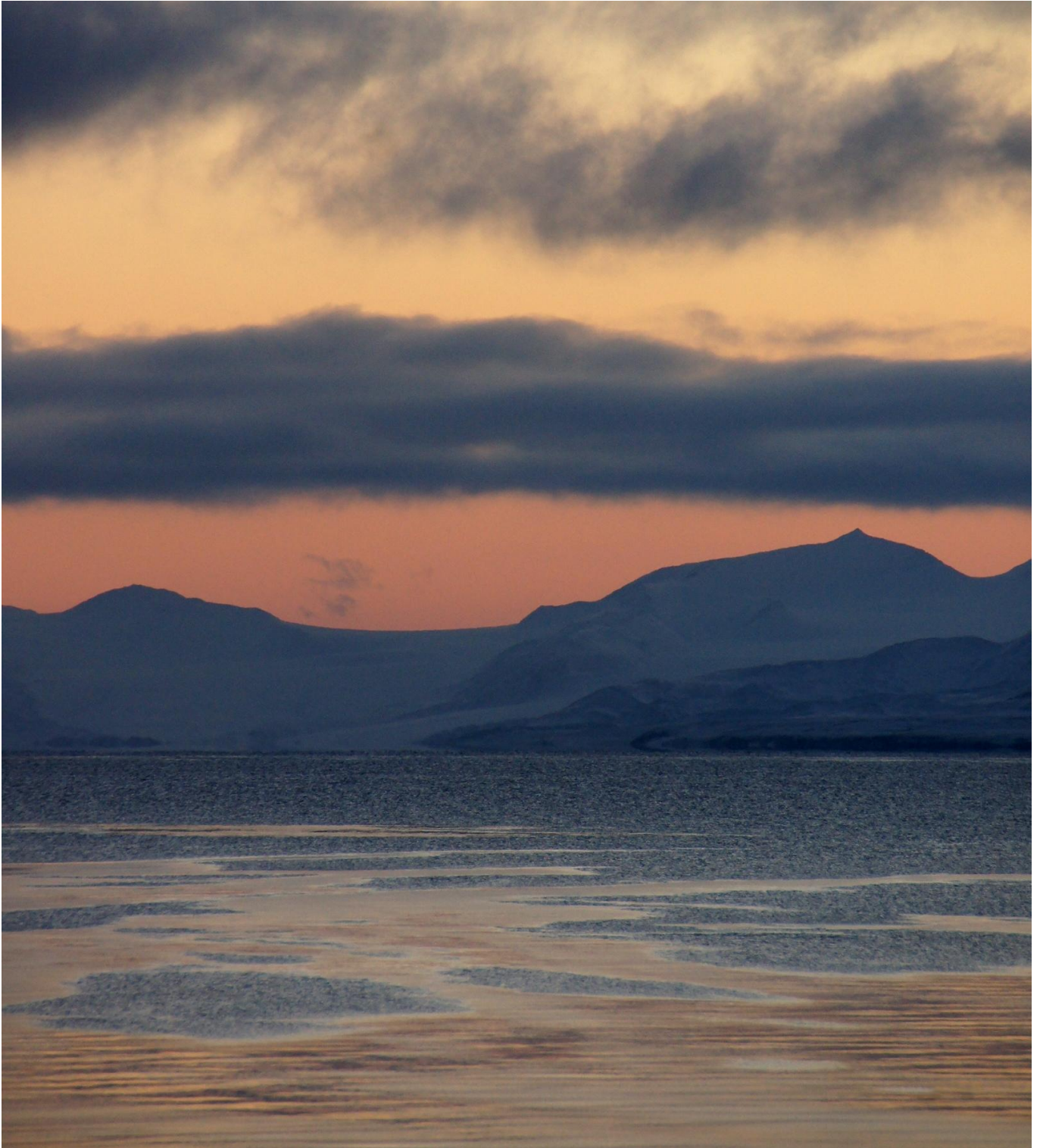
given svalbard's arctic location (from 74 to 81 north latitude), the landscapes are mostly harsh, mainly rock structures, soft ones or rough ones, plus very many glaciers.

only a tenth of the area is vegetated. there are some shrubs but no trees.









during 3 to 4 months there is polar night in svalbard, that is, no sun. at that time colourful polar light (aurora borealis) can be seen.





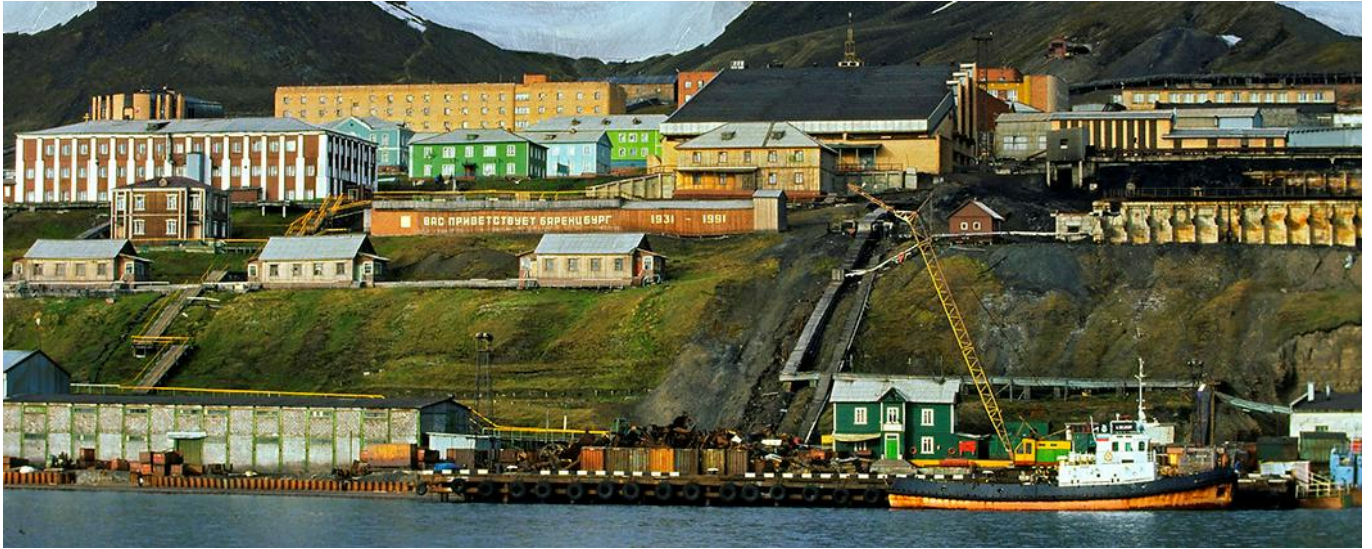
BARENTSBURG

this coal-mining town owned by Russia goes back to a dutch enterprize in the 1920s and was acquired by the sowjet union in 1932. mining is still done, yet only on a small scale. in its heyday, 1100 russian and also ukrainian citizens inhabited barentsburg; today about 300 are left and live there.

beside its industrial facilities, the town has/had an art center, schools, history museum, a lenin statue and of course several pubs.

barentsburg is on its way, slowly, to become a tourism place. visitors mostly come by boats from longyearbuen.







there are even paintings of barentsburg in the past... when walking through this half-dead russian town, one experiences a strange mixture of alive and of abandoned buildings.

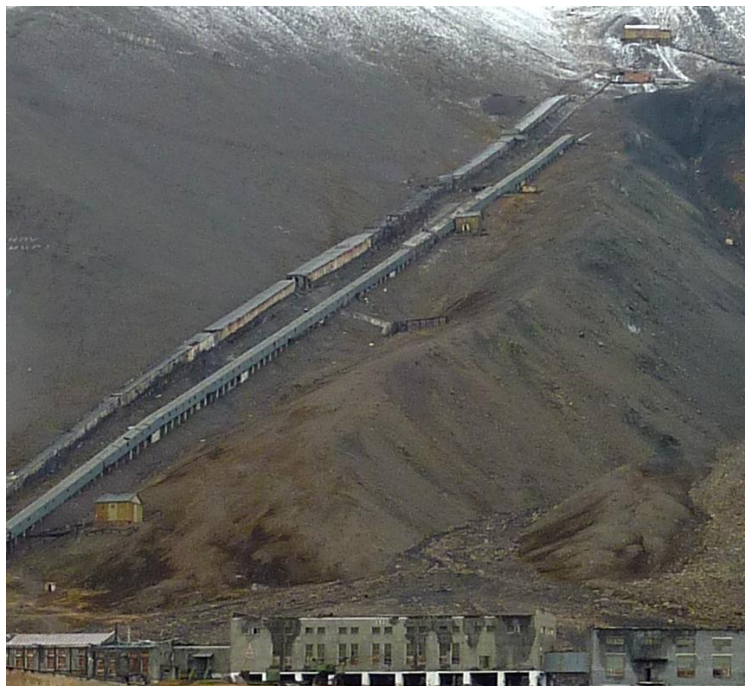
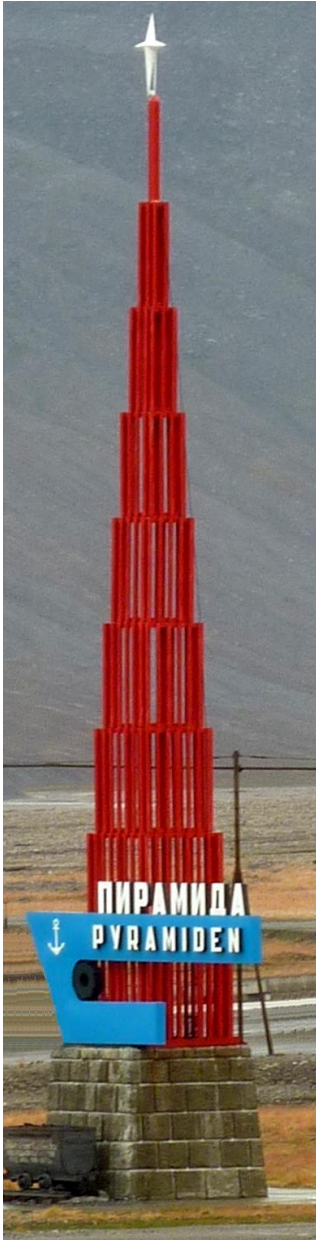
PYRAMIDEN

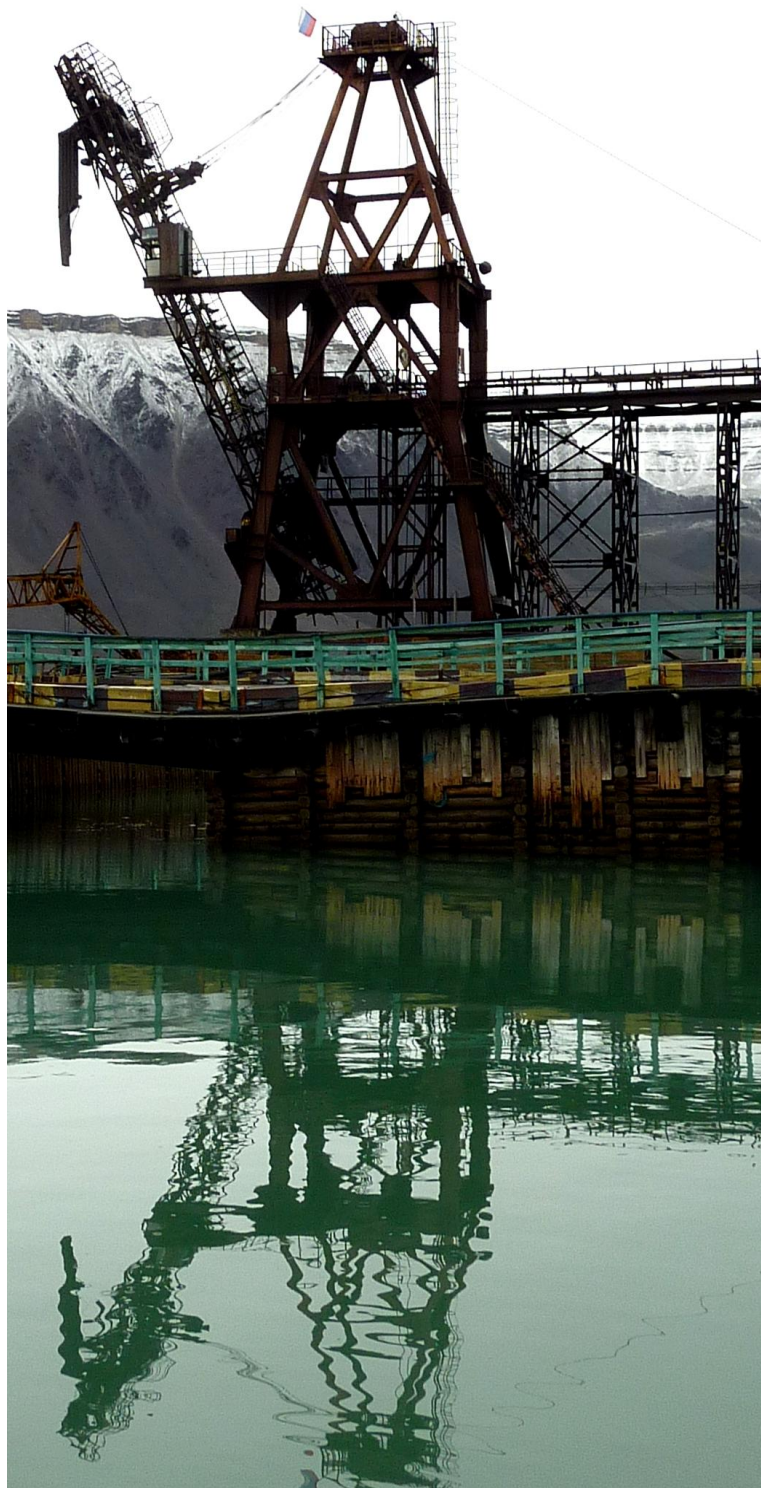
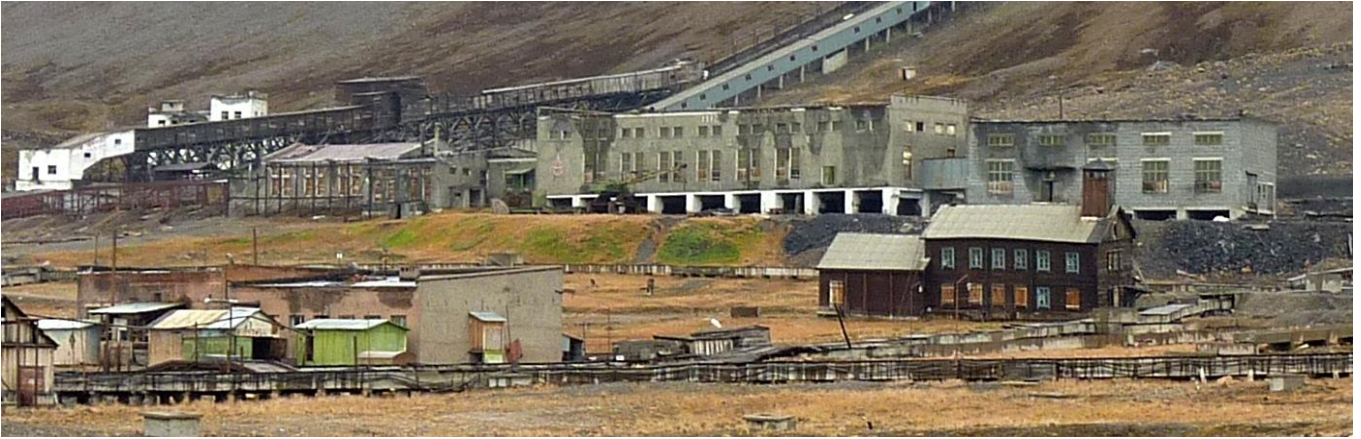
pyramiden is an ex-coal-mining town owned by russia. it was established by swedish miners and 1927 taken over by the soviet union. in its prime time about 1000 russians lived there.

the 'compulsory' lenin statue is the most northerly one. the town was fully supplied with facilities such as an art center, theatre, library, school and sport provisions, including a swimming pool.

in 1998 russia closed pyramiden rather suddenly, and all residents left. since then it is kind of a ghost town - yet almost all buildings and technical instalments are still in place, and the final coal digging is well visible. in recent years pyramiden has become a target for svalbard tourists.







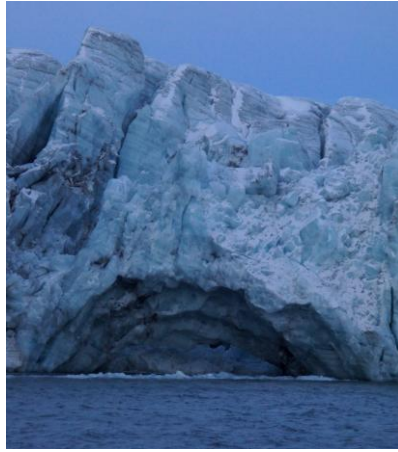


walking through such a dead yet often alive-looking settlement is actually a weird experience!

GLACIERS

svabard has a rough climate, and there are many glaciers on all its islands. most of them flow into the ocean, and their frontline looks spectacular. the ice may appear white or blue there.





given the recent climate changes, glaciers tend to become smaller, and some don't reach the sea.



when glaciers reach the sea and break off, icebergs result, large ones or small ones, in all sorts of shapes.



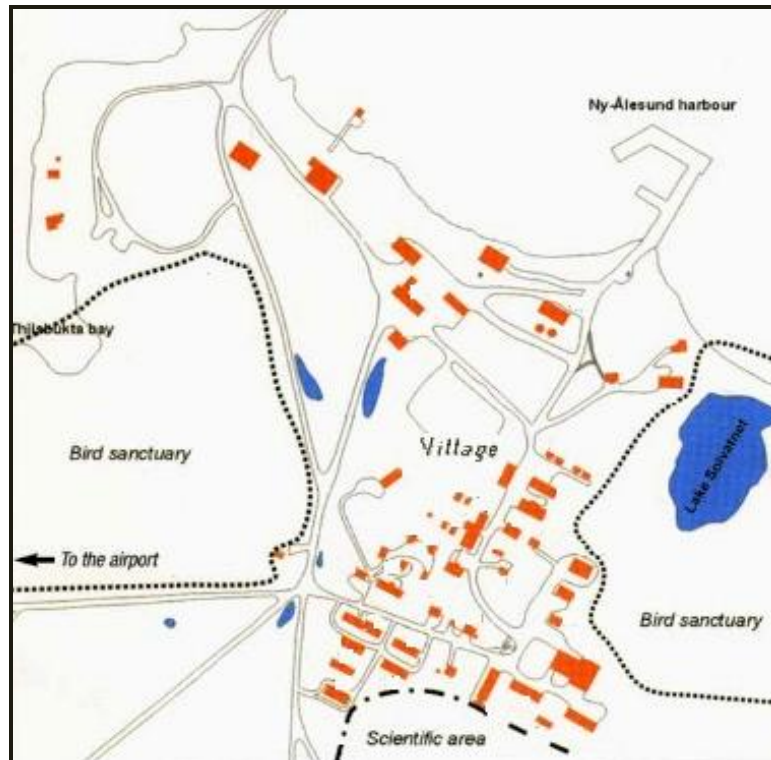


NY ALESUND

for many travellers, svalbard is above all special because of its nature - yet its few towns are exciting targets as well...



ny alesund also began as coal-mining place, as the other villages, in 1917. conditions were harsh. after years of on and off, a heavy fatal accident in 1962 lead to the end of all mining activities. the former coal train is nowadays just an historic memorial... yet this was not the end!



in fact ny alesund is a very small town, with an all-year permanent population of about 30, and a summer population of about 120. it has basic facilities, like a shop, a post office, and even one hotel., named "northpole".

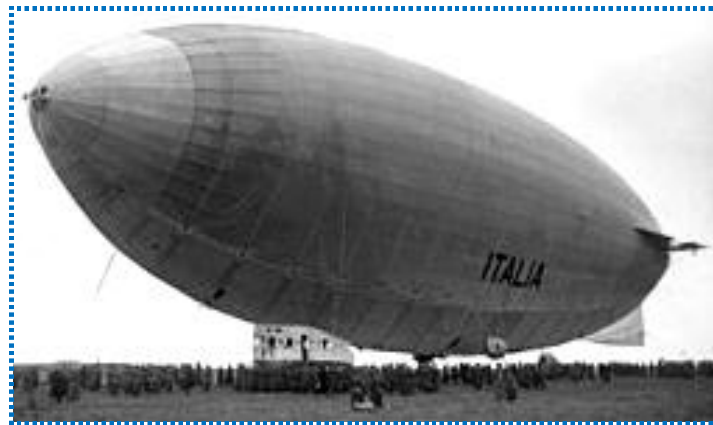


ny alesund is actually the northernmost settlement in the world, and unique in two regards:

<1> several attempts to fly over the north pole started in ny alesund. in 1926 it were roald amundsen together with lincoln ellsworth and umberto nobile to realize the first flight over the pole, on march 12, in the airship "norge", which had been designed by nobile in italy.

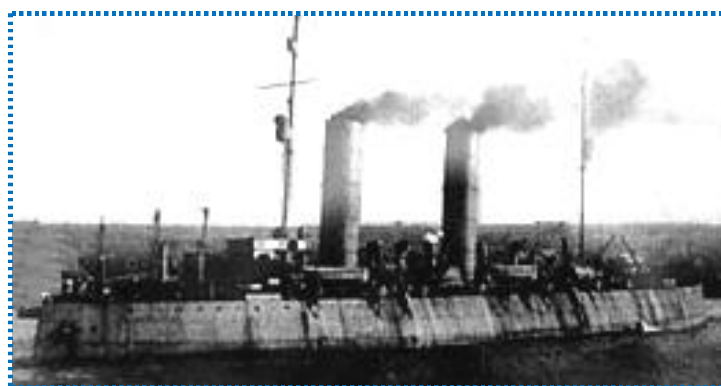


amundsen and nobile, who was a highly ranked general in italy, did not accept each other, and finally nobile built a further airship, named "italia", for a purely italian adventure.



it left, under the command of general nobile, ny-alesund on 23 may 1928 to indeed reach the north pole - however, it crashed when flying back.

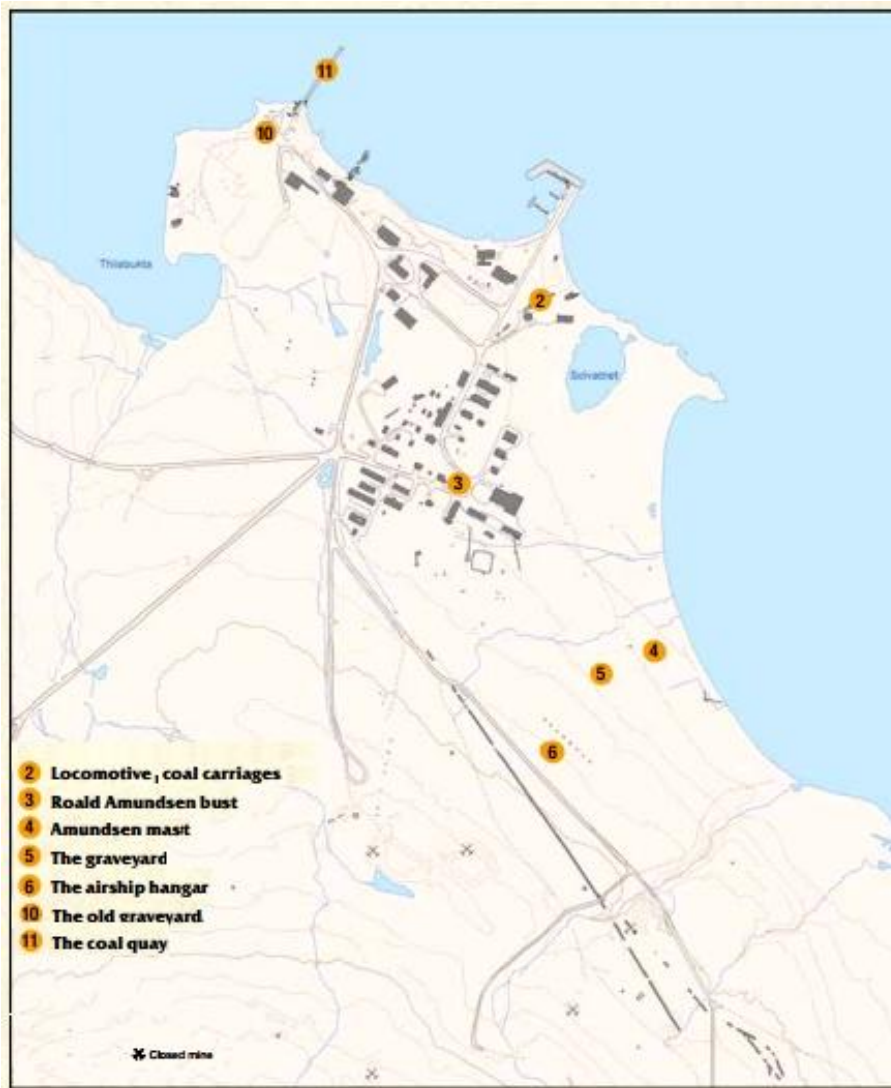
after a huge international rescue action, 9 people were found and salvaged by the russian icebreaker "krasin", including nobile himself.



sadly so, a french airplane heading for ny alesund to participate in the rescue operation, broke down while over the sea and was never found ; one of the five people on it was - roald amundsen.

<2> in ny alesund are sixteen permanent research stations, which are based on institution from ten different countries, including india and china. most of them operate year-round.

it is this which has finally made ny alesund a permanent city.



the "amundsen mast", used for airships, still stands, and there is a memorial statue for roald amundsen in the middle of the town.



SAILSHIP ARCTICA 2 (aug 2018)

the sailship "arctica-2" is pretty new, and it has a strong engine, thus it's not dependent on sailing when on the move. the ship has 4 cabins, each with three beds, and thereby can handle 12 passengers. its kitchen is quite mighty.



the sails are large, and, under wind, the ship can undertake pretty wild sailing.



the arctica-2 is equipped with two dinghies = rubberboats. these are used for landings. the passengers need to have rubber shoes and rubber trousers when walking to the land.

and at the end of each excursion, after getting out of all the equipment, lunch or dinner is ready, including wine!

SAILSHIP NOORDERLICHT (nov 2014)

the sailship "noorderlicht" is over 100 years old. it was originally a german fire ship (that is, a ship working as a lighthouse) and positioned in the baltic sea. after it was discarded and about to get scrapped, two dutch captains bought it, and got it re-built as a passenger ship for small groups (up to 10 people). it also has a small engine, used if sailing is not feasible. the noorderlicht mainly operates in northern europe, including greenland. passengers live on the ship for one or two weeks.





regarding spitsbergen - as there are almost no piers available, a dinghy is used for excursions and landings.





the final picture: looking at the noorderlicht at night (actually: polar night).

postscriptum

at the aug-2018 voyage, unfortunately about 100 of my photographs got lost! so for some of the topics presented here i had to pinch a few pic's from the internet!

