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SVALBARD ARCHAEOLOGY SYMPOSIUM 2026

Svalbard Heritage in a Cold Oceans Perspective

6-7 OCTOBER / LONGYEARBYEN

LASSEGROTTA / SVALBARD MUSEUM

WELCOME

A maritime crossroads

Lassegrøtta · Svalbard Museum · Longyearbyen

Svalbard is often seen as a distant European periphery. Viewed from the surrounding seas, it becomes a maritime crossroads linking mainland Europe, Greenland, Jan Mayen, Iceland, Canada, Russia and the wider Arctic. Its cultural heritage reflects centuries of movement across these waters: European whaling, Pomor hunting and trading, polar exploration, research and more recent geopolitical change.

These connections invite us to understand Svalbard's past through comparison with its oceanic neighbours. They also make the urgent challenges of the present impossible to ignore. Climate change is altering or destroying archaeological evidence, while new political tensions can obscure the complexity of Arctic histories.

This symposium brings together archaeology, cultural heritage management and environmental research. It asks how heritage can be studied and cared for in a rapidly changing Arctic, what comparative perspectives reveal about the region's past, and how long-term monitoring and shared data can better inform future decisions.

ORGANISERS

Svalbard Museum, the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU), the National Museum of Denmark, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), and Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador (MUNL).



Funded by the Research Council of Norway

Tuesday 6 October

Morning

09:00-09:15	COFFEE
09:15-09:30	Introduction · Anatolijs Venovcevs Svalbard Museum
09:30-09:45	Svalbard Museum - A brief history of its inception and collection Trygve Sikveland Røysland · Svalbard Museum
09:45-10:00	Conservation of archaeological organic and inorganic materials at Svalbard Museum Unn Gelting · Svalbard Museum
10:00-10:15	A Short Introduction to Svalbard's Built Cultural Heritage Frode Sekse Hilleren, Erki Markson, and Torbjørn Opheim · Svalbard Museum
10:15-10:30	From Collections to Landscapes: New Approaches to Svalbard Archaeology Lise Loktu · NIKU
10:30-11:00	COFFEE BREAK
11:00-11:15	Climate Change and Archaeological Heritage in the Arctic: From Greenland to Svalbard Jørgen Hollesen · National Museum of Denmark
11:15-11:30	Burial Landscapes & British Burials on Svalbard Robyn S. Lacy · Memorial University
11:30-11:45	Encounters in a Cold Land: Inuit Approaches to Early European Resource Extraction in Labrador, Canada Lisa K. Rankin · Memorial University
11:45-12:00	When Igloolik Becomes the Northwest Passage Kirstine Møller Gray · University of Groningen
12:00-13:30	LUNCH BREAK

Tuesday 6 October

Afternoon

13:30-13:45	Relocating Heritage: A Relational Approach to Fragmentation and Cultural Heritage Ingar Moen Johnsen · University of Oslo
13:45-14:00	Russia's Only Svalbard Colony: An Archaeology of an Extraterritorial Periphery Anatolijs Venovcevs · Svalbard Museum
14:00-14:15	Big Bones, Big Business: Whales, Walruses, and the Exploitation of Svalbard Youri van den Hurk · University of Bergen
14:15-14:30	Archaeological Marine Mammal Bone Steroid Hormones as Indicators of Past Human-Ocean Interactions Aripekka Junno · University of Oulu
14:30-15:00	COFFEE BREAK
15:00-15:15	Remnants of industrial whaling: the forgotten shore stations of the 19th and early 20th centuries Jen Harland · University of the Highlands and Islands
15:15-15:30	Svalbard Submerged - past, present and future Jørgen Johannessen · Norwegian Maritime Museum
15:30-15:45	Searching for Svalbard's submerged past: lessons learned from two seasons in the field Kevin Martin · University of Iceland / Norwegian Maritime Museum
15:45-16:00	ARCHEOROBOTICS - Finding and Investigating Shipwrecks in the High Arctic Øyvind Ødegård · NTNU University Museum
16:00-16:15	Aviation Archaeology of a small Mediterranean Island Timmy Gambin · University of Malta
16:15-16:30	Archaeology and Heritage of Arctic Aviation in Svalbard Oula Seitsonen · University of Oulu

Wednesday 7 October

Programme ends after lunch

09:00-09:30	COFFEE
09:30-09:45	Svalbard Research Office Turid Lie Vilkenzen · Svalbard Research Office
09:45-10:00	The Role of Riksantikvaren on Svalbard Line Bårdseng · Riksantikvaren
10:00-10:15	Permits, Pitfalls, and Polar Bears: A Survival Guide to Svalbard's Laws and Regulations Monika Serafinska · Governor of Svalbard
10:15-10:30	Cultural Heritage Management at 79 Degrees North Solveig Roti Dahl · Kings Bay AS
10:30-11:00	COFFEE BREAK
11:00-11:15	Archaeology at Jan Mayen - An Unstable Source of Unique Arctic Knowledge Erik Kjellman · Arctic University Museum of Norway
11:15-11:30	Svalbard Integrated Arctic Earth Observing System and the Monitoring of Threats to the Archipelago's Cultural Heritage Ashley Morris, Christiane Hübner, Zoé Brasseur, Tessa Viglezio, Rudolf Denkmann, Daan Kivits, Øystein Godøy, Heikki Lihavainen · SIOS / Norwegian Meteorological Institute
11:30-11:45	Xlendi Archaeological Park - Managing a Deepwater Archaeological Resource Timmy Gambin · University of Malta
11:45-12:00	Lessons Learned from Place-Based Archaeological Research in Labrador, Canada Scott Neilsen · Memorial University
12:00-13:30	LUNCH BREAK

Abstracts · 6 October

06 OCTOBER · 09:30-09:45

Svalbard Museum - A brief history of its inception and collection

Trygve Sikveland Røysland

Svalbard Museum

Svalbard Museum originated as many museums do as a local initiative and a small collection of «curiosities» - initially housed in the old post office in Longyearbyen.

From there it grew into a substantial collection of cultural heritage objects and artefacts, for several decades stored in the decommissioned pig barn, until Svalbard Museum as we know it today was founded in 2006, and moved into Svalbard Science Centre.

Today the collections consist of more than 55.000 objects, 180.000 historical photographs and 22 shelf meters of archival materials, and includes archaeological, cultural- and natural historical objects from the whaling period, Russian and Norwegian fur-trapping, polar expeditions and exploration, the mining industry and modern, every day life.

06 OCTOBER • 09:45-10:00

Conservation of archaeological organic and inorganic materials at Svalbard Museum

Unn Gelting

Svalbard Museum

This presentation provides a brief overview of the conservation work carried out at Svalbard Museum on archaeological organic and inorganic objects originating from whaling stations and trapping sites recovered from the Arctic environment.

The archaeological material includes both organic and inorganic objects. Organic materials comprise wood, leather, textiles, rope, bone, antler, and other animal-derived materials. Inorganic materials include metals such as iron, copper alloys and lead, as well as ceramics, glass, stone, and composite objects, all of which have survived due to the dry and cold Arctic climate and permafrost conditions.

The presentation outlines the conservation workflow from the arrival of an archaeological object at the museum through documentation, condition assessment, conservation treatment, and long-term storage.

The primary aim of conservation is to ensure that the archaeological objects remain accessible for research and exhibitions while safeguarding their long-term preservation and scientific value for future generations.

06 OCTOBER • 10:00-10:15

A Short Introduction to Svalbard's Built Cultural Heritage

Frode Sekse Hilleren, Erki Markson, and Torbjørn Opheim

Svalbard Museum

How do you preserve 180 cable car trestles scattered across the Arctic landscape? How do you maintain a 100-year-old trapping cabin that was never intended to survive for more than a few years?

This presentation offers a glimpse into our work, the unique heritage sites we care for, and the challenges of preserving cultural heritage on Svalbard.

06 OCTOBER • 10:15-10:30

From Collections to Landscapes: New Approaches to Svalbard Archaeology

Lise Loktu

Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU)

A decade of working with Svalbard's archaeological heritage, first in cultural heritage management at the Governor of Svalbard and, for the past four years, as a researcher at NIKU, has given me a particular perspective on how archaeological knowledge about the archipelago is produced, managed and used. Archaeology on Svalbard has been shaped by changing institutional and political priorities, from extensive fieldwork in the 1970s–80s to increasingly restrictive excavation policies. The result is an uneven archaeological record, substantial underused museum collections, and significant gaps in knowledge.

These challenges motivated CLIMARCH, a research programme exploring both the vulnerability and scientific potential of Svalbard's archaeological heritage. Using the early modern whaling landscape of Smeerenburgfjorden as a regional case, we combine existing collections and excavation records with new field observations and approaches from bioarchaeology, geomorphology, climate and permafrost research. Reassessments of human remains, textiles and archaeological contexts from burial sites demonstrate how even relatively simple approaches can generate new knowledge about health, nutritional stress, physical workload, mobility and living conditions, while documenting how permafrost degradation, ground instability and coastal erosion are simultaneously transforming the archaeological archive.

This work exposes a wider problem. Despite extensive climate research and environmental monitoring on Svalbard, archaeological heritage remains weakly integrated into climate adaptation and long-term environmental planning – a significant policy blind spot as irreplaceable archaeological archives are being altered or lost. Drawing on CLIMARCH and experience across research and heritage management, I argue that addressing this gap requires closer collaboration between researchers, heritage managers and political decision-makers, stronger integration of archaeological and natural-scientific perspectives, and more active use of existing collections. Archaeological sites should be recognised not only as vulnerable remains requiring protection, but as irreplaceable archives for understanding both human lives and environmental change in a rapidly changing Arctic.

06 OCTOBER • 11:00-11:15

Climate Change and Archaeological Heritage in the Arctic: From Greenland to Svalbard

Jørgen Hollesen

National Museum of Denmark

Climate change is rapidly transforming the preservation conditions of archaeological sites across the Arctic. Rising temperatures, permafrost thaw, changing hydrological regimes, and accelerating coastal erosion threaten cultural heritage that has remained exceptionally well preserved for centuries.

For more than a decade, I have worked in Greenland to understand how environmental change affects the preservation of archaeological deposits and organic materials. Combining field observations, environmental monitoring, laboratory experiments, remote sensing, and numerical modelling, we have demonstrated substantial regional differences in site vulnerability and revealed how temperature, soil moisture, and oxygen availability interact to control rates of degradation.

Building on these experiences, our new research project on Svalbard investigates the vulnerability of seventeenth-century whaling sites associated with the early European exploitation of the High Arctic. Many of these sites are increasingly threatened by coastal erosion and permafrost degradation. Particular focus is placed on the cemetery at Jensenvatnet on Danskøya, where ongoing shoreline erosion is already affecting exceptionally well-preserved human remains and organic materials. By integrating archaeological fieldwork, environmental monitoring, remote sensing, and climate impact assessment, the project aims to improve our understanding of how rapidly changing Arctic environments affect archaeological resources and to support future strategies for documenting and managing threatened cultural heritage.

06 OCTOBER • 11:15-11:30

Burial Landscapes & British Burials on Svalbard

Robyn S. Lacy

Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador

Burial grounds from the 17th century remain an understudied topic due to their lack of visibility on the surface at many colonial settlements. In North America, few of these sites have undergone excavation and much of the archaeological data collected is from surface survey and documentary evidence. On Svalbard, there are numerous well-preserved 17th-century burial sites associated with British whaling stations which have never been surveyed or studied in depth due to their remote location and lack of interest by English scholars. This paper will discuss the 17th-century burial landscape development in northeast North America from the author's PhD research, and proposed research to expand our understanding of British burial practices on Svalbard during the early 17th-century whaling period.

06 OCTOBER • 11:30-11:45

Encounters in a Cold Land: Inuit Approaches to Early European Resource Extraction in Labrador, Canada

Lisa K. Rankin

Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador

Between the 16th and 18th centuries successive groups of Basque, French and British crossed the Atlantic each summer to whale and fish in the icy waters of the Labrador coast. These seasonal ventures brought them into contact with Indigenous Inuit who had similar traditions of sea travel and marine harvesting, and who themselves had followed whales to the Labrador coast only recently. These encounters shaped the seasonal activities of both groups who added trade and sometimes skirmish to their traditional summer tasks. For Inuit particularly the opportunities and challenges posed by these annual meetings would infiltrate almost every aspect of their society. Archaeology makes it possible for us to see these transformations to Inuit cultural practices and to understand the deeper traditions which informed the Labrador Inuit approach to their ever-increasing participation in the international economy.

06 OCTOBER • 11:45-12:00

When Igloodik Becomes the Northwest Passage

Kirstine Møller Gray

The Arctic Centre, University of Groningen

This paper examines how Arctic geographies become legible through the narratives used to describe them. Drawing on recent fieldwork in Igloodik and the Amittuq region of Nunavut, it takes as its point of departure a recurring observation: while Igloodik and Foxe Basin are often geographically unfamiliar to Norwegian audiences, their location becomes immediately recognisable when described in relation to the Northwest Passage.

This paper considers this shift as more than one of terminology. It juxtaposes Inuit understandings of the Arctic as homeland, constituted through relations, movement, harvesting, memory and place, with the colonial geographical imaginary of the Northwest Passage as route, objective and achievement. Moving between Amundsen's journeys northward, Kakonita and Camilla's journey southward to Norway, and my own contemporary experience as an Arctic Indigenous researcher and mother living in Norway, I consider what happens when the conventional geographical and narrative direction of polar history is reversed.

06 OCTOBER • 13:30-13:45

Relocating Heritage: A Relational Approach to Fragmentation and Cultural Heritage

Ingar Moen Johnsen

University of Oslo

It is common archaeological and museological practice to bring loose finds and artefacts into museums for conservation, study, and display. Large, fixed structures, by contrast, have traditionally been preserved in-situ, where their relationship to the surrounding landscape forms an important part of their historical context. What happens when a structure is instead removed from this setting?

This presentation introduces an ongoing article examining the relocation of the Rekvika trapping cabin on Svalbard from its remote coastal setting to the Svalbard Museum. Drawing on relational approaches to heritage and assemblage theory, I will follow the cabin through dismantling, transport, and reconstruction as a museum display, giving particular attention to the separation and redistribution of its material components. I approach these processes as fragmentation, examining how relocation alters the relationships, capacities, authenticity, and legibility of a heritage structure while producing new and dispersed versions of the site.

06 OCTOBER • 13:45-14:00

Russia's Only Svalbard Colony: An Archaeology of an Extraterritorial Periphery

Anatolijs Venovcevs

Svalbard Museum

The Russian-speaking Pomors from the White Sea Region are notable for being the first to overwinter in Svalbard. Despite their mastery of the Arctic environment, the Pomors or the Russian Empire never tried to establish a permanent colony on Svalbard with one possible exception – the base for Admiral Vassily Chichagov's expedition which operated at Tomtodden in Recherchefjorden in 1764-1766. This talk examines whether the base at Tomtodden was actually a colony by asking three questions: In what ways did the Russian Empire colonize? What was the stated purpose of the base at Tomtodden and the Chichagov expedition? And what was, ultimately, the Russian Empire's relation to Svalbard in the 18th century?

In so doing, the presentation opens to a broader question that is timely in the context of the currently frigid relations with the Russian Federation – how is one meant to understand the 18th and 19th century Pomor material housed at the Svalbard Museum at a time when travel and collaboration with the Russian Federation is completely impossible?

06 OCTOBER • 14:00-14:15

Big Bones, Big Business: Whales, Walruses, and the Exploitation of Svalbard

Youri van den Hurk

University of Bergen

Svalbard's coast preserves unusually visible archaeological traces of the intensive marine-mammal industries that transformed the Arctic from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. This paper combines zooarchaeological, osteometric, spatial, and radiocarbon evidence from early seventeenth-century bowhead whaling at Gåshamna with later Pomor walrus hunting at Dolerittneset, Kraussbukta, and Trygghamna. At Gåshamna, bowhead remains cluster around tryworks and working areas, revealing organized zones for landing, flensing, disarticulation, rendering, and discard, with exploitation focused mainly on adult animals. The walrus sites document a different strategy: animals were killed at coastal haul-outs, tusk-bearing portions removed, and much of the carcass left behind. Radiocarbon evidence indicates intensive eighteenth-century hunting at Dolerittneset and Kraussbukta, followed by later exploitation at Trygghamna, where juveniles are more frequent. Together, these sites reveal changing strategies of Arctic resource extraction and show how archaeological faunal assemblages can reconstruct exploitation intensity, selectivity, and long-term ecological consequences across successive phases of commercial expansion.

06 OCTOBER • 14:15-14:30

Archaeological Marine Mammal Bone Steroid Hormones as Indicators of Past Human-Ocean Interactions

Aripekka Junno

University of Oulu

In recent years, archaeologists and marine biologists have increasingly collaborated to deploy novel analytical techniques to investigate past animal physiology, aiming to better understand how marine species adapted to and were influenced by human activities. Among the most innovative of these emerging approaches is the extraction and measurement of steroid hormones preserved in skeletal structures and soft tissues. These endocrine markers offer unprecedented insights into the livelihood, physiological health, and reproductive patterns of past animals at both the individual and population levels.

Our research team utilizes these tools to examine how prehistoric and early industrial human communities interacted with and exploited coastal maritime resources, such as fur seals, sea lions, and walruses. We employ advanced mass spectrometric approaches to identify and quantify steroid hormones in bone and tooth dentine samples. By integrating this novel endocrine evidence with bone stable isotope data, we aim to successfully reconstruct a holistic picture of the animals' physiology and diet over the long term, and hoping to reveal the hidden biological costs of human exploitation.

Currently, this methodology is being applied in an ongoing collaboration with Hokkaido University. This project focuses on human-ocean interactions among maritime forager communities during the Jomon period and later eras, specifically examining the exploitation of North Pacific otariids. Building upon this framework, we are now expanding our research with the help of Svalbard Museum to investigate the history of human-animal ecodynamics in Svalbard over the past 300 to 400 years. This upcoming research phase aims to explore the long-term biological impacts of diverse historical activities in the High Arctic, including intensive whaling, marine mammal harvesting, mining operations, and fur trapping.

06 OCTOBER • 15:00-15:15

Remnants of industrial whaling: the forgotten shore stations of the 19th and early 20th centuries

Jen Harland

University of the Highlands and Islands

Large shore stations were built to process whales on an industrial scale in the final decades of the 19th century, and into the early years of the 20th century. From Norwegian origins they expanded across the North Atlantic, including Scotland and Svalbard. Most were short-lived, though the last closed in the 1980s. They employed many locals yet protests abounded because of perceived impacts on fish stocks and pollution from abandoned carcasses, leading to early 'save the whales' campaigns. What happened to the remains of these stations? In most cases, they are not preserved or under any archaeological protection. Aside from one in the Faroes that is now a whaling museum, most are forgotten – as is this challenging period of our whaling history. Why are they so neglected, when there is an interest in preserving the Antarctic whaling story at South Georgia, and an increased interest in memorialising whaling? What can be done to encourage preservation of these sites, from basic recording of standing remains to public display?

06 OCTOBER • 15:15-15:30

Svalbard Submerged – past, present and future

Jørgen Johannessen

Norwegian Maritime Museum

The first underwater archeological investigation by Norwegian Maritime Museum was undertaken in 1966. The number of shipwrecks in the waters around Svalbard is estimated to 1200. However, only a handful is found. At the last symposium in 2023 we decided to look for funding for projects underwater. Also, we had a look at the material from the collection at the Svalbard Museum. Since then, Norwegian Maritime Museum have found shipwrecks and cultural heritage objects protected by law. Also, we have documented ship constructions with laser scanners for the Governor of Svalbard. Have we found the methods for finding submerged shipwrecks around Svalbard? Are there new tools in our toolbox that should be set in use?

06 OCTOBER • 15:30-15:45

Searching for Svalbard's submerged past: lessons learned from two seasons in the field

Kevin Martin

Rannsoknastofa í fornleifafræði, Háskóli Íslands / Norsk Maritimt Museum

Where are Svalbard's shipwrecks? More than 1,000 vessels are thought to have been lost in the waters around the archipelago, yet only a small number have been located. Over the past two years, the Minerva and Svalbard Submerged projects have searched for wrecks and other submerged cultural heritage using side-scan sonar, multibeam, AUV, ROV and diving survey.

From Minerva in Grøn fjorden to historic anchorages at Engelsbukta, Smeerenburg, Danskegattet and Trinityhamna, the work demonstrates that knowing where ships were lost and actually finding them are very different things. Arctic seabed conditions, preservation and natural sedimentation processes all complicate archaeological detection.

This presentation considers what two seasons of searching have taught us, how these lessons are refining our survey methods and how systematic survey, baseline documentation and repeat monitoring can contribute to understanding and managing Svalbard's submerged cultural heritage in a rapidly changing Arctic environment.

06 OCTOBER • 15:45-16:00

ARCHEOROBOTICS - Finding and Investigating Shipwrecks in the High Arctic

Øyvind Ødegård

NTNU University Museum

Many shipwrecks remain archaeologically inaccessible because they lie in deep water, remote regions, or areas that are difficult and expensive to survey. This is particularly relevant in the Arctic, where limited ship time and challenging environmental conditions restrict archaeological investigation.

The ERC project ARCHEOROBOTICS explores how autonomous underwater vehicles can detect and investigate potential wreck sites around Svalbard over extended periods without continuous human supervision. A central challenge is how such systems can make decisions that reflect archaeological reasoning rather than simply detecting generic seabed anomalies.

The project combines technological development with cultural-historical research. Historical sources are used to reconstruct maritime activity, identify areas where wrecks may be expected, and provide the archaeological context needed to interpret new discoveries. At the same time, newly located and investigated wrecks can contribute to a better understanding of maritime activity, ship technology, and the use of Arctic waters in the past.

06 OCTOBER • 16:00-16:15

Aviation Archaeology of a small Mediterranean Island

Timmy Gambin

University of Malta

Malta's small size, strategic position, and history have led to many aviation relics being found underwater. This presentation examines the evolution of aviation archaeology on the island, from enthusiasts' efforts to recover aircraft to systematic archaeological research. It also covers heritage management approaches that combine archival research, GIS, technical diving, photogrammetry, and AUVs to locate, document, and monitor aircraft wrecks. The presentation also discusses the ecological importance of submerged aircraft. The presentation also highlights Malta's integrated approach to public access, including controlled diving, digital interpretation, and immersive outreach, showing how a small island has adapted to a disproportionately large deposit of underwater aviation archaeology.

06 OCTOBER • 16:15-16:30

Archaeology and Heritage of Arctic Aviation in Svalbard

Oula Seitsonen

University of Oulu

Svalbard has a unique record of aviation heritage ranging from the early ballooning and airship attempts to fixed wing expedition flights, and Second World War and Cold War military flights to modern mass tourism charters. Aviation is a theme that demands archaeologically an open-minded approach, as its material traces are typically indirect, including for example expedition bases, runways, airship hangars, aircraft crash sites, and remote weather, radio and radar stations. Nowadays these often appear on site as material scatters of twisted metal fragments, burn marks and altered vegetation, linked together by their original purpose. Still, this aviation heritage draws visitors, which in turn causes rapid wear and tear on these fragile Arctic sites in remote areas where the contrast between high-tech operations and roadless wilderness makes the aviation legacy particularly evocative. Eerie Arctic Aviation, a four-year project based at the University of Oulu and funded by the Research Council of Finland, explores broadly the cultural heritage of aviation in the polar regions. Geographically the project focuses primarily in Sápmi (northern Finland and Norway), Svalbard and Greenland, documenting both specific sites and their atmosphere. In Svalbard our field research centers on documenting various kinds of aviation sites, and also the emotions evoked by that heritage, especially the "haunting" effect this legacy leaves on the landscape. Key themes include (1) pioneer aviation, an era when all boundaries awaited to be broken, (2) the Second World War, which shattered all boundaries, and (3) the Cold War, a period that drew new global dividing lines even across the frozen peripheries, and which legacy persists today as the lingering "New Cold War", especially in the High Arctic.

Abstracts · 7 October

07 OCTOBER · 09:30-09:45

Svalbard Research Office

Turid Lie Vilkenzen

Svalbard Research Office

Svalbard is one of the world's most important Arctic research regions, attracting researchers from more than 40 countries and hundreds of institutions. The Svalbard Research Office is a joint initiative of the Research Council of Norway and the Norwegian Polar Institute, established to support the implementation of Norway's Strategy for Research and Higher Education in Svalbard.

This presentation will provide a brief introduction to the office, its mandate, and its role in supporting research activities, collaboration, and coordination across the research community in Svalbard.

07 OCTOBER · 09:45-10:00

The Role of Riksantikvaren on Svalbard

Line Bårdseng

Riksantikvaren

Riksantikvaren (The Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage) has the authority, following the Svalbard Environmental Protection Act, to make decisions in matters that affect protected cultural heritage monuments and environments - be they automatically or protected by individual order. Riksantikvaren monitors major planning matters and provides input to the Governor of Svalbard in matters where it is involved (new zoning plans, Nybyen, and so forth). We are advisers to the Governor and collaborate with the Ministry of Climate and Environment, Norwegian Polar Institute, and the leader of a project group on "Waste, contamination and cultural heritage" on assignment from Ministry of Climate and Environment. Riksantikvaren has a polar team with one person focused on newer material, one in archaeology, and a lawyer.

07 OCTOBER • 10:00-10:15

Permits, Pitfalls, and Polar Bears: A Survival Guide to Svalbard's Laws and Regulations

Monika Serafinska

The Governor of Svalbard's Office

Doing research in Svalbard sounds exciting, but have you heard of the Svalbard Environmental Protection Act? It will definitely make your blood flow faster, long before you set foot in this part of the Arctic.

In this presentation, Monika Serafinska, Cultural Heritage Advisor at the Office of the Governor of Svalbard, offers a practical guide to navigating the legal and administrative realities of research in the Norwegian High Arctic. The presentation will cover the permits required for research in Svalbard, how the application process works, and ways to avoid common pitfalls. You will gain insight into how cultural heritage management is organized and the role of the Governor's office. Useful tips for smooth sailing through the sea of laws and regulations will be provided.

Quite possibly the most boring presentation of the seminar, yet one that may save your research project.

07 OCTOBER • 10:15-10:30

Cultural Heritage Management at 79 Degrees North

Solveig Roti Dahl

Kings Bay AS

Ny-Ålesund is a cultural heritage site with the highest concentration of standing protected buildings in Svalbard. Established as a mining community in 1916, most of its cultural heritage assets are closely linked to its mining history. As the owner of both the land and the buildings, Kings Bay AS is responsible for safeguarding and managing these cultural heritage values.

Ny-Ålesund is not only a cultural heritage site, but also a community, an international research station, and a designated planning area. Combined with its remote Arctic location, these multiple functions create unique challenges for site management. Like many Arctic settlements, Ny-Ålesund is increasingly affected by climate change and permafrost thaw, which pose significant risks to its cultural heritage. These environmental pressures add a further dimension to the management and preservation of the site's historic buildings and infrastructure.

07 OCTOBER • 11:00-11:15

Archaeology at Jan Mayen – An Unstable Source of Unique Arctic Knowledge

Erik Kjellman

Norges arktiske universitetsmuseum

Jan Mayen, a remote volcanic island in the North Atlantic, presents unique challenges for archaeological research. In this presentation I will focus on two key historical sites: Kvalrossbukta, a significant 17th-century whaling station, and "Østerrikeren" in Maria Muschbukta, the remains of the Austro-Hungarian research station from the first Polar Year in 1882-1883.

Excavation records from the 60's can be compared with several surveys from later years, where a rapid rate of coastal erosion can be observed. The remaining archaeological evidence are in a perilous state, waiting to be swept away into the deep seas surrounding Jan Mayen. Furthermore, in my presentation I will addresses the significant logistical hurdles of conducting fieldwork in such an isolated location, including extreme inaccessibility and the reliance on military transport for access. Is there any hope of saving what is left?

07 OCTOBER • 11:15-11:30

Svalbard Integrated Arctic Earth Observing System and the Monitoring of Threats to the Archipelago's Cultural Heritage

Ashley Morris, Christiane Hübner, Zoé Brasseur, Tessa Viglezio, Rudolf Denkmann, Daan Kivits, Øystein Godøy, Heikki Lihavainen

SIOS; Norwegian Meteorological Institute

Svalbard is among the most rapidly warming locations on the planet, leading to profound environmental changes. The resultant permafrost thaw, coastal erosion, avalanches and landslides pose a threat to the archipelago's unique cultural heritage. The Svalbard Integrated Arctic Earth Observing System (SIOS) is an international research infrastructure committed to the development and maintenance of a regional observing system for longterm observations in Svalbard and its surrounding waters. It focuses on processes within – and interactions between – the atmosphere, cryosphere, hydrosphere, geosphere, and biosphere. The datasets, research infrastructure, and data management expertise provided by SIOS could aid in the monitoring of cultural heritage sites under threat from environmental change, and aid in the prioritisation of preservation efforts.

07 OCTOBER • 11:30-11:45

Xlendi Archaeological Park - Managing a Deepwater Archaeological Resource

Timmy Gambin

University of Malta

The Xlendi Underwater Archaeological Park in Gozo is situated at depths of approximately 95-120 metres. It presents challenges linked to managing a large, complex, and partially understood cultural and natural resource. This presentation examines the management framework developed to balance in situ preservation, scientific research, controlled technical-diving access and wider public engagement. It considers the use of AUV survey, photogrammetry, surveillance, and repeatable monitoring to establish baselines and detect change, alongside adaptive responses to threats such as ghost fishing gear and unauthorised activity. Particular emphasis is placed on how deep-water heritage can remain protected while still being accessible, interpretable and publicly relevant internationally.

07 OCTOBER • 11:45-12:00

Lessons Learned from Place-Based Archaeological Research in Labrador, Canada

Scott Neilsen

Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador

Over the last two decades I have participated in archaeological projects in central Labrador, working primarily with Innu organizations and individuals. Over this time, and as a direct result of working in cooperation with Innu, and other Labradorians - including Inuit and Settlers, my positionality has shifted from one based largely on cultural awareness to one seated in cultural humility. In this presentation, I will use examples from past and on-going archaeological research projects in Labrador to narrate different stages in this transition and describe my current approach to the design and delivery of locally relevant and responsive archaeological research.

About the symposium

Organised by Svalbard Museum, the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU), the National Museum of Denmark, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), and Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador (MUNL).

Funded by the Research Council of Norway.

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Notes

SVALBARD ARCHAEOLOGY SYMPOSIUM 2026

Longyearbyen · 6–7 October

SVALBARD MUSEUM · NIKU · MUNL

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF DENMARK · NTNU

Funded by the Research Council of Norway