

## Safety at 78° North

This folder has been created to provide a brief guide to the potential hazards that exist when moving about on Svalbard. The safety courses at UNIS will provide you with the training, knowhow and skills required to take part in excursions and field trips, but do not necessarily cover all aspects of your travels as a private individual. Therefore you must be sure to acquire sufficient expertise and knowledge about Svalbard so that you can safely get about on private outings.

The staff at UNIS will be pleased to answer any queries you may have concerning the topics below. If we don't know the answer, we will send you to someone who does.

### Topics:

#### **1. Glaciers and how to cross them**

About 60 per cent of Svalbard is covered by glaciers. Travelling on a glacier, whether by snow scooter, by foot, or on skis, requires special equipment as well as special skills and knowledge. All glaciers - including those close to Longyearbyen - have dangerous melt water channels and deep crevasses. Make sure you are up-to-date on the local conditions and take along the proper equipment!

Note that all glaciers release running water at the mouth, even in winter, and even in deep frost, and this may cause you serious difficulties.

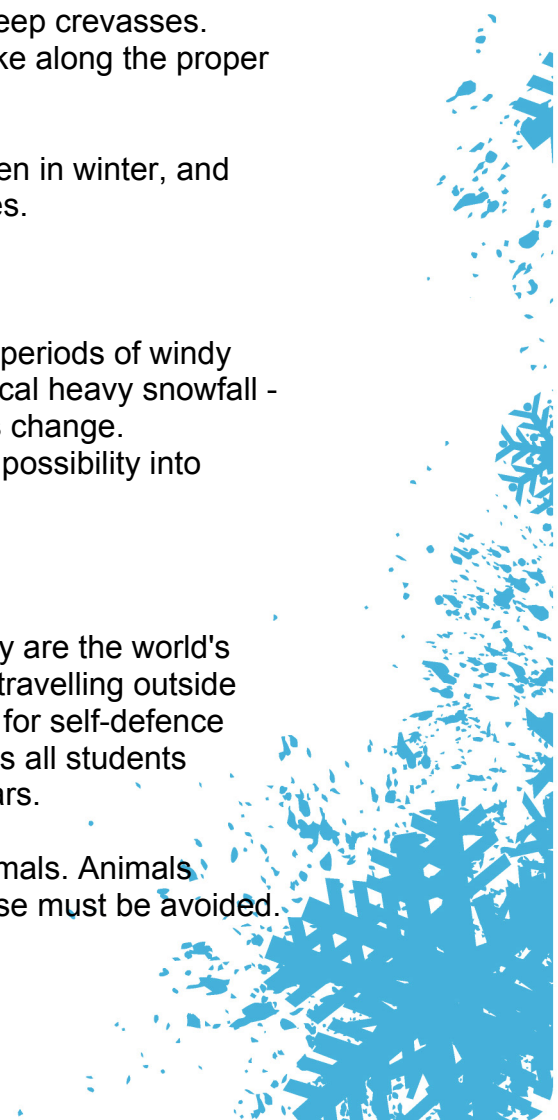
#### **2. Snow and avalanche hazard**

Even though Svalbard tends to have little precipitation, long periods of windy weather can redistribute the snow, and this - coupled with local heavy snowfall - can represent an avalanche risk, especially as temperatures change. Avalanches do happen on Svalbard, and you must take this possibility into account.

#### **3. Animal life**

Polar Bears can be encountered anywhere in Svalbard. They are the world's largest carnivore and represent a danger to humans. When travelling outside Longyearbyen you are strongly recommended to take a rifle for self-defence and a signal pistol or similar to scare off the bear. UNIS gives all students training in use of a rifle and pyrotechnics to scare off the bears.

Rabies exists on Svalbard and you must not touch dead animals. Animals exhibiting strange behaviour or showing indications of disease must be avoided.



Parasites: "Echinococcus multilocularis" has been found on Svalbard and can infect humans. The parasite can cause serious illness resulting in death. You can be infected by the droppings of foxes and dogs. To avoid contamination, water close to present and abandoned homesteads and cabin areas must be boiled before consumption. Observe normal hygiene before meals.

#### **4. Weather conditions**

The weather changes fast on Svalbard. During all seasons you have to be prepared for cold, wet weather and strong winds. The weather conditions on Svalbard tend to differ a great deal locally due to the narrow valleys and presence of glaciers. You must plan on meeting all types of weather when touring and carry equipment and clothing to survive in all conditions. In summer fog often closes in and poses quite a challenge. In winter "white outs" can occur due to wind swirling up the loose snow and your vision subsequently becomes completely obliterated.

#### **5. Clothing**

Must be suitable for time of year and generally be both wind and water proof. Extra layers for extreme conditions are a must. In winter you must be able to cover all bare skin with insulating wind-proofs. Multiple layers of clothing generally give a better result than a single thick coat. Clothes and shoes must be large enough to accommodate an extra layer of insulation underneath.

#### **6. Equipment**

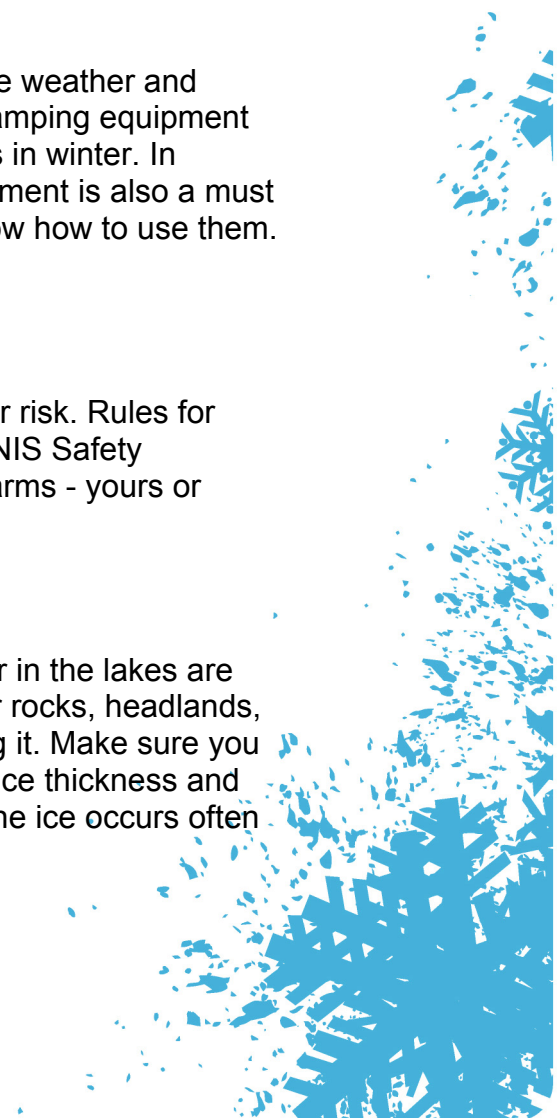
All trips in the wilderness must be planned based on extreme weather and possible delays due to weather. A tent, sleeping bag, and camping equipment are therefore essential on all scooter trips or long skiing trips in winter. In summer always carry an insulating wind bag. First-aid equipment is also a must on all trips. You will need a map and compass and must know how to use them. GPS is also a useful aid.

#### **7. Guns**

There are lots of guns in Longyearbyen due to the polar bear risk. Rules for using, transporting, and storing guns are described in the UNIS Safety Instructions ([www.unis.no](http://www.unis.no)). Careless use or handling of firearms - yours or someone else's - must be avoided at all costs.

#### **8. Negotiating ice on fjords and lakes**

For much of the year the sea in the fjords and the freshwater in the lakes are covered by ice. Local geographical features, like underwater rocks, headlands, currents and ice falls can fracture the ice, without you seeing it. Make sure you are up-to-date on local conditions and be careful to monitor ice thickness and condition before setting out across it. Surface water above the ice occurs often and may be a real hazard.



## 9. Use of small boats

Use of small boats of all types demands intimate knowledge of the type involved and its motor. Spare parts, tools, and extra cans of fuel are necessary precautions. Sea voyages require the strictest clothing requirements and a certified immersion suit is the only workable option. Factors like rapidly changing weather, confused seas (due to ice-floes or underwater rocks), freezing water and often difficult landing places mean that people using small boats must have experience and knowhow. Note especially that glaciers, where they meet the sea, shed blocks of ice which can pose a danger if you approach too close.

## 10. Using snow scooter

You must have a motor-car driver's licence or a special scooter licence to drive a snow scooter. It will quickly take you over long distances, which means you need to be extremely careful to carry with you spare parts, extra fuel, personal clothing, and emergency gear. The best choice of route and the proper way to conduct yourself at all stages of the trip will demand familiarity with almost all the factors discussed in this folder. You need to be particularly careful when driving in poor weather or poor visibility or when crossing a glacier or ice, as this is when your knowledge and expertise will be tested to the full.

A helmet is mandatory for all UNIS scooter work.

The speed limit is 80 km/h in the wilderness and 30 km/h in residential areas.

## 11. Getting about Longyearbyen in winter darkness

Longyearbyen has quite a lot of traffic, but drivers are not used to city conditions or the presence of pedestrians. As a vulnerable pedestrian you must allow for poor visibility and slippery roads. Accordingly you must wear a reflector and have a light on your bike. Don't expect other drivers to always respect your right of way - they may not know you are there.

## 12. Notification rules for private outings

The population density on Svalbard is sparse and you can go many days in the wilderness without encountering a soul. Often the closest settlement is days away and the only communication that works is by satellite. For that reason you have to advise somebody of where you will be and when you will return. Indicate possible alternative routes and the equipment you and your party will take along. Be sure to make a binding arrangement with someone you can rely on so a search party can be sent out if anything goes wrong. And if anything does go wrong, you will find it extremely difficult to cope alone.

Finally, therefore: **NEVER GO ON A TRIP ALONE!** Make sure you have company.

Tour Safely!

