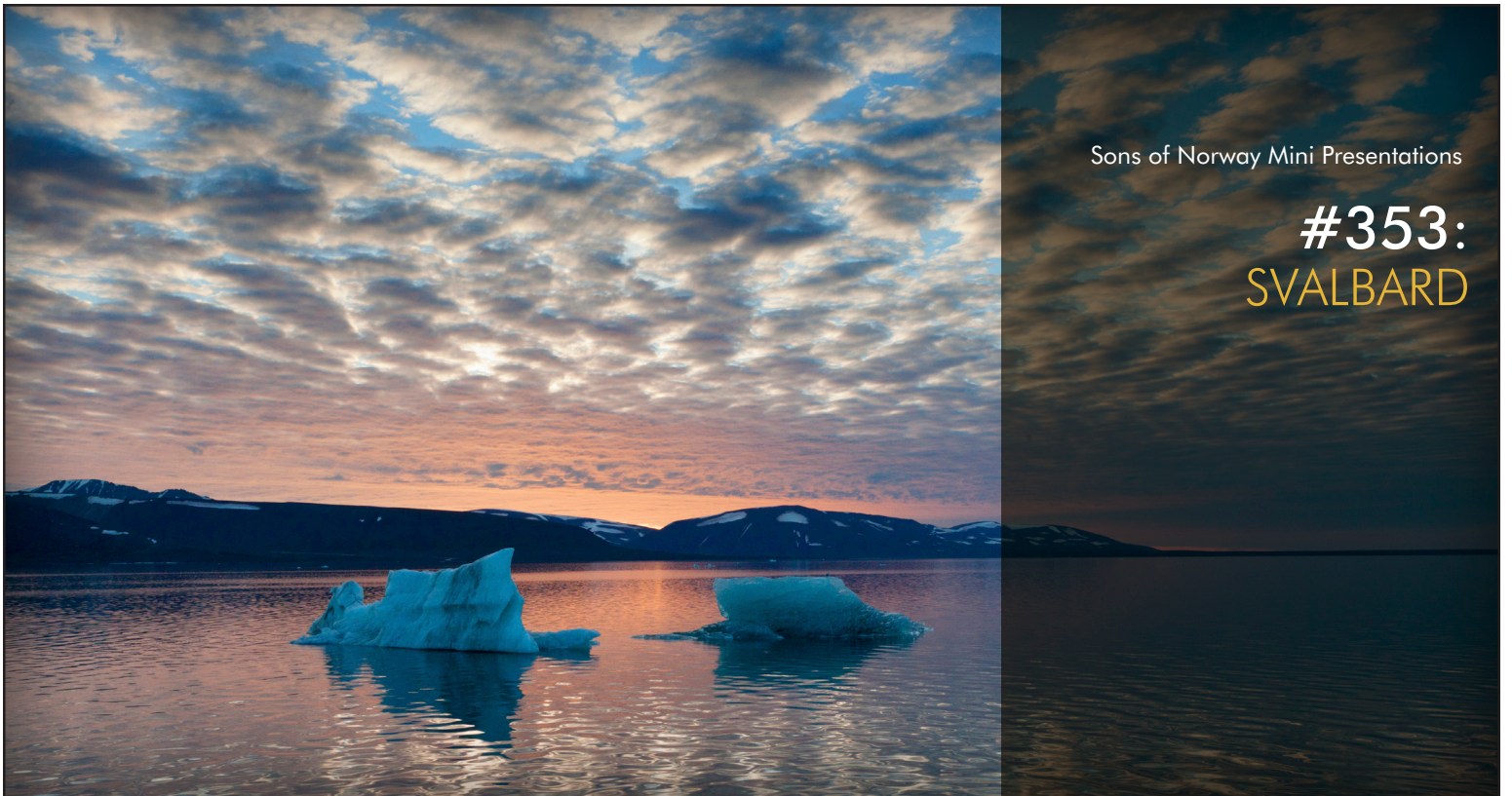


#353: SVALBARD



Svalbard is the northernmost place in the world that sustains a permanent population. In 1920, Norway's territory was expanded when the Svalbard islands came under Norwegian jurisdiction with the Svalbard Treaty. The treaty between Norway, The United States of America, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Ireland, British overseas Dominions, and Sweden recognized the sovereignty of Norway over the Arctic archipelago of Svalbard, at the time called Spitsbergen. This sovereignty is subject to certain stipulations, and not all Norwegian Law applies. The treaty does restrict all military activities on the islands, but gives equal rights to commercial activity to the treaty signers.

Svalbard is unincorporated but maintains a state-appointed governor in the capital of Longyearbyen. The archipelago of Svalbard is about 60,000 square kilometers and sits between Norway and the North Pole. The island chains are traditionally referred to as Spitsbergen, however Norwegians renamed the archipelago Svalbard (old Norse for 'cold coast') and named the largest and most populated island Spitsbergen.

According to Icelandic annals dating back to 1194, Svalbard was first discovered by seafarers in the Viking era. Re-discovered by Dutch explorer Willem Barents in 1596 the area soon became a prosperous location for whaling and fishing, bringing a larger population of residents to the area. Although the thriving industries were introduced by the Dutch and English, the land was given to Norway in the early 20th century. Fishing in Svalbard is now controlled by the Norwegian Ministry of Fishing.

As the population grew, so did industry. By the 20th century arctic exploration and coal mining were thriving in and around Svalbard. The Svalbard Mountains have layers of coal – fragments of lush forests that have grown in this area for over one billion years. Norwegian coal mining company, Store Norske has been based in Svalbard since 1916 and is an important contributor to the economy in the capital of Longyearbyen. Today Store Norske is the most successful mining company still operating in Svalbard.

Svalbard was evacuated during World War II. The Germans occupied Norway and Svalbard was used as a meteorological outpost. Following the war, Norway re-established mining operations on Svalbard and by 1964 the European Space Research Organisation (ESRO) opened facilities in Ny-Ålesund, Spitsbergen. Today, with a population of about 3,000 people, Svalbard's

main industries are coal mining, tourism and arctic research. Norwegians occupy the area but Svalbard is also home to a number of Russian and Ukrainian inhabitants working as miners. Because of Svalbard's habitable land so close to the North Pole, the area also welcomes polar research scientists from around the world.

Tourism in the area has grown immensely with outdoor winter activities such as glacier hiking, sea kayaking, snowmobiling, and dog-sledding. Arctic cruises are becoming increasingly popular as visitors enjoy whale and polar bear watching so far north. In fact, Svalbard is moving 2mm closer to the North Pole each year. The University Centre in Svalbard (unis.no) is located in Longyearbyen and prides itself on being the northernmost institution for higher education in the world. Svalbard is also extremely proud of its latest addition, a global seed bank that received funding from well-known contributors such as Bill Gates and the Rockefeller Foundation. The 'doomsday seed bank' as many are calling it, preserves a wide variety of plant seeds from around the world and is safely located within a vault inside a sandstone mountain on Spitsbergen.

Svalbard experiences weather, wildlife and scenery like no other place in the world. This place is truly a unique part of Norway, and one that should be cherished and preserved for years to come.

