

Spitsbergen / Svalbard

A complete guide around the Arctic archipelago.

Rolf Stange

*Third Edition, 2012, Publisher: Rolf Stange. Soft cover.
ISBN 978-3-937903-14-9, 511 pages.*



The author of the book has a long-term experience with polar regions because he has travelled to many locations in the Arctic and Antarctic since 1993. Among the locations he has visited, Svalbard has an exclusive position because the author visited Svalbard many times and reached much experience when having numerous hiking trips over the archipelago. Moreover, he overwintered at Kap Linné (SW Svalbard) for three months which also helped him to understand ecological consequences of winter climate at the archipelago. Thanks to his personal experience with Svalbard, the author wrote an excellent guide that was issued in 2008 for the first time. In March 2012, the third edition of the book appeared.

The book consists of seven chapters and numerous subchapters. The main division reflects the general goal of the book: *i.e.* to provide travellers full information about Svalbard from a tourist's point of view. Therefore, one chapter is devoted to the ways how to travel to and within the archipelago. Apart from traditional transportation, the author overviews less frequent (at least for tourists) ones related to outdoor activities such as *e.g.* kayaking, dog sledging, horse riding and skiing. In this part of the book, he gives valuable suggestions how to behave in open tundra following natural protection rules, safety rules related to field camps *etc.* The part of the book related to natural history of Svalbard is really worth because it gives a reader many pieces of information about Svalbard's fauna and flora. I would like to point out a precise description of plants and animals that follows a well-designed scheme. First, a plant/animal is described with special attention to its size, life form and sexual dimorphism, if there is any. Then, information about distribution and migration of the organism is given which provides a reader with a clear idea where a tourist could expect and see a particular organism in the field. Further text provides information on the biology of organisms describing mainly peculiarities of the ecosystem in which an organism is abundant and detailed information on the position of the organism in the food web. Last but not least, there is a miscellaneous part in which some specific features of the organism are described. Such a scheme provides a comprehensive piece of information on the plants and animals of Svalbard.

A substantial part of the book deals with the history, geology and geography of Svalbard. I find it very useful because there is a lot of information attracting both travellers and polar research professionals. For each important location, detailed information about the history of discovery and/or settlement is given with special emphasis given to differences between particular locations. Many expeditions and stations are described in this part of the book. The author reports a wide variety of information ranging from *e.g.* changes of local geographical names over a course of time to the peculiarities of geological structure and former mining technologies applied there. A reader also

welcomes information on heritage sites that are quite numerous over the Svalbard archipelago.

Throughout the book, there are many positive features that attract reader's attention and pushes the book from a standard tourist guide to a higher quality. First, it is a high number of excellent photographs taken by the author that document particular locations. Their selection was made with high professionalism not only because of their informative and documentary value but also artistic beauty involving *e.g.* perfect composition of landscape photographs. Secondly, names of plant and animals typical for Svalbard are given not only in latine but also in seven other languages (German, Danish, French, Italian, Norwegian, Dutch, and Swedish) which help international readers to understand. Another important feature apparent throughout the book is a unified division of the text devoted to particular geographical location. It starts with general description of the site followed by the information on geology and landscape. Then, flora and fauna is described with detailed information on species diversity with a special attention to local highlights. Finally, history of the site is described, absolutely exhaustively in majority of cases. Appart of high informative value of the book, there are some minor number of items that could be better done. It is valid especially for the numerous maps, that miss a scale. It is not crucial problem because many maps have inserted a silhouete map of Svalbard archipelago with a frame delimiting the area showed at a map. In some cases, however, such indication is missing.

For those people who are familiar with polar regions, it is clear that the book was written with a great enthusiasm of the author who, thanks to many stays at Svalbard, gained personal experience with local ecosystems. Therefore, the book is not only a perfect tourist guide attracting people to come and see but also a comprehensive source of information for professionals in polar science who may use it for logistic and field works planning. It could be also recommended to university students of geology, biology, and ecology of polar regions, Svalbard in particular. Last but not least, the book undoubtedly will attract the people with interest of history of polar explorations because there are may information related to first explorers of Svalbard, history of coal mining and North Pole expeditions exploiting Ny-Alesund as a base for airship landing.

Miloš Barták (Brno)