

SPITSBERGEN-SVALBARD: A COMPLETE GUIDE AROUND THE ARCTIC ARCHIPELAGO.

Rolf Stange. 2012. 512 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 978-3-937903-14-9, 30€

I have never been to Svalbard. Yet, the archipelago has for a long time been on my 'to-travel-list' and after having read this 'complete guide', it has moved much, much higher on said list.

What independent writer, publisher and expedition leader Rolf Stange has accomplished with this book is extraordinary. Not only is it incredibly informative and comprehensive, it is also written with such passion that I would love to pack my things now and just go to Svalbard! And why is this so? Because Stange knows how to carry his love and admiration for Svalbard and the Polar Regions to the reader.

This book which has been published in English and in German is not just a travel guide, though it is a travel guide. It provides the reader with so much vital information on the archipelago that one feels truly prepared when travelling there. The book starts off with a detailed description of how to travel to and in the archipelago, where to travel, what to consider, who to contact, what to enjoy and what not to do. He then makes the reader aware of the fragile Arctic environment and locates the human being in it. The protection of health and safety of the traveler as well as of flora and fauna form an integral part of this book. Stange manages to make the reader understand all different aspects of visiting Svalbard and the well-being of all entities interacting with one another serves as a normative element in this book.

After some travel hints and a description of the archipelago's capital Longyearbyen, Stange provides an excellent overview of Svalbard's environment. But it is not necessarily natural history which he presents, rather, it is an incredibly informative summary of natural history, flora and fauna. Not only does he depict the cryospheric and geological environment, but he briefly introduces every animal species under sections subdivided into 'description', 'distribution/migration' and 'biology'. Also the archipelago's flora is described in a way that sheds light on its characteristics, distribution and general information. What makes this section so noteworthy are the pictures that Stange added for each species. While it would have been better to have the pictures directly on those pages in which the species is described rather than having them in a separate section, the reader is nevertheless invited to look at the images, learn to admire the wildlife and the environment of Svalbard and to just dream. It seems like this section draws from CAFF's well-known Arctic Flora and Fauna Report (CAFF 2001) as well as personal observations and experiences.

After the depiction of the natural environment, Stange ventures into the history of Svalbard. His way of making its history understandable is special as he does take indeed a chronological approach, yet with special foci, for example the Pomors, explorers or the role of mining and whaling in the development of Svalbard and ultimately the conclusion of the Spitsbergen Treaty. While Stange does not claim to provide a complete overview, it gives the reader a fantastic understanding of the different historical facets of the archipelago.

And now we have reached the second half of the book in which Stange delves into the different regions of Svalbard, of which he has identified 23 and which he subdivided into its different fjords, islands etc. This section comprises about half of the book and constitutes therefore the main focus of this work. This section shows that Stange clearly knows what he is writing about. And indeed, he does! Not only does he provide the reader with a general overview of the respective region, but he also explains the history of the names, the history of the different places as well as geology and flora and fauna. It is impossible to highlight any specific segment of this section, as once again, the informative standard of this book makes it so much fun to read that time just flies by. The knowledge the reader gains through reading this book is unprecedented. And as in the chapter on flora and fauna, Stange has added pockets of pictures from the different regions.

Stange concludes the book with a small chapter on environmental problems in the archipelago. He abstains from pointing fingers or making the problems of mining, overfishing or fossil fuels the centre of this chapter, but rather provides some thoughts on how visitors to Svalbard can drastically reduce their environmental footprint: by choosing environmentally friendly means of transport in the archipelago itself, or general ways of behaviour at home. The book concludes with a reprint of a letter of several expedition leaders to the editor of *Svalbardposten*, the local newspaper in Longyearbyen, with suggestions on the latest Management Plan for East Svalbard, which aims at making certain areas only available for scientists, challenging this closure for tourist-based traffic. This last section of the book tilts towards the tourist-operators' side, without providing the Norwegian authorities' view on the matter. It would have sufficed to say that the closing of certain areas may not find the unchallenged support by all in the archipelago and that environmental protection and tourism do not necessarily exclude one another.

I can only conclude by saying that I have truly enjoyed this book. It is indeed a 'complete guide around the arctic archipelago.' When I will travel to Svalbard, this book will definitely be in my hand-luggage and accompany me around the different places. The only slightly negative thing that I can say about this book is the absence of any further readings, since Stange touches upon so many different elements of interest which not everybody might know good literature for. He indeed refers to his own website www.spitsbergen-svalbard.com and his own books, but for example a reference to the aforementioned CAFF Report, which is freely accessible, may inspire the interested reader to learn more about the Arctic. Also the reprinting of the letter to *Svalbardposten*'s editor is not really necessary. Yet, this is criticizing a book which does not provide much else to criticize. I can highly recommend this volume to all those wanting to learn about Svalbard in an easily understandable way. (Nikolas Sellheim, Faculty of Law, University of Lapland, PO Box 122, 96101 Rovaniemi, Finland (nikolas.sellheim@ulapland.fi)).

Reference

CAFF (Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna). 2001. Arctic flora and fauna: Status and Conservation. Helsinki: Edita.