

= Svalbard Rocket Range =

The Svalbard Rocket Range (Norwegian : Svalbard Rakettskytefelt) or SvalRak is a launch site for sounding rockets at Ny Ålesund in Svalbard , Norway . The site has been in use since 1997 and is owned by Andøya Rocket Range , which is again owned by the Norwegian Space Centre and the Kongsberg Group . SvalRak 's location at the 79th parallel north makes it well suited for launching rockets to investigate Earth 's magnetic field . It is used mostly by American , Japanese and Norwegian researchers . It is the world 's northernmost launch site .

= = History = =

Planning of a launch site in Ny Ålesund started in 1993 , a location chosen because of its ideal location to study the polar cusp . Construction of the site started in the summer of 1997 . The Norwegian Institute for Air Research , which conducts air measurements in Ny Ålesund , was concerned that the rockets could pollute their measurements . A test rocket was launched on 15 November . The first proper launch was a Norwegian rocket , Isbjørn 1 , which contained instruments from University Centre in Svalbard , the University of Tromsø and the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment . The 510 kilogram (1 ,120 lb) rocket had a payload of 70 kilograms (150 lb) and reached 120 kilometers (75 mi) altitude . It was followed by two Black Brant rockets for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration which reached an altitude of 500 kilometers (310 mi) .

SvalRak originally held permission to fire four rockets every four years . Forty one rockets had been launched by 2004 , with a peak altitude of 108 kilometers (688 mi) . The site was upgraded in 2008 .

= = Use = =

SvalRak is the world 's northern most rocket launch site , and is located at the 79th parallel north . This makes it an ideal location for sending instruments into Earth 's magnetic field and the polar cusp , cleft and cup . It is also used for studying the Magnetopause and aurora borealis , for which Ny Ålesund is the most convenient location because of its ease of access . It is owned by Andøya Rocket Range , which is owned by the Norwegian Space Center (90 percent) and the Kongsberg Group (10 percent) . SvalRak has no permanent staff in Ny Ålesund . The main users are American and Japanese and to a less extent Norwegian .