

Winter jackets

Want to be ready for anything? Want to stay warm and dry no matter what the sky is doing? Want a jacket that looks smart round town too? Look no further...

Jackets suitable for winter use should be tougher and harder-wearing than other lighter weight tops. You should expect to be wearing them, rather than tucking them away in your pack for emergencies.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Waterproofing Full-on winter jackets should be the most waterproof and breathable of any jackets. Waterproofing a coat is always a compromise between stopping rainwater from getting in and allowing sweat to escape. A jacket that is 100% waterproof will undoubtedly be 0% breathable (a bin bag is a good example). A good balance, however, is achieved in a few different ways...

Polyurethane coating Less expensive jackets have a layer of polyurethane (PU) on the inside. Water vapour passes through this layer to the outside. The outer side of the face fabric is coated with a Durable Water Repellent (DWR) to further help keep moisture out. This type of waterproofing tends to be less breathable than others.

Membrane Gore-Tex and eVENT are brand names of membrane materials that work in similar ways. A layer of polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) is welded to the underside of the face fabric. This layer allows the flow of

moisture outwards but not inwards. The main difference between Gore-Tex and eVENT is how the membrane is protected. Gore-Tex uses a PU layer beneath the membrane to protect the material, while eVENT keeps the pores open by protecting each one individually.

Layers True all-weather jackets should really be built with a three-layer construction. This means that in addition to the face fabric with a DWR coating and a membrane layer, there is a scrim layer on the inside. This scrim is a kind of rough, ridged fabric that absorbs moisture into the membrane and draws it away from the skin. A 2.5 or two-layer membrane jacket won't have this, which means condensation can build up inside the jacket.

Hood The best hoods have a reinforced peak, strengthened either with wire or a strip of plastic that deflects rain. In more mountaineering-style jackets, hoods are normally very large inside, so as to accommodate a climbing helmet. Look for plenty of adjustment to get the hood to fit around your face snugly without letting rain in through the gaps. The best hoods have three cinch cords to pull the hood tight (one on either side of the collar, and another at the back to reduce the volume of the hood). Clever jackets have cinches that are adjustable with one hand.

Venting No matter how good your amazing technical fabric is, the chances are that it will still be a bit too warm and sweaty in harder conditions. Zip vents will help draw away moisture but will add to the weight and packability of the jacket. Of course, as you'll probably be wearing the jacket most of the time, that shouldn't be a huge problem.

Pockets More pockets mean more zips, and more chances for rain to seep into the coat. A couple of pockets should be enough. Make sure they are high enough to use whilst wearing a rucksack with waistbelt. Some mesh-lined pockets double up as vents too.

Zips More technical jackets use waterproof-style zips to keep the rain out, sometimes with an inner storm baffle. Less technical jackets use non-waterproofed zips with inner and outer stormflaps.

Fit A winter jacket should fit well enough so that you can move around in comfort and also have enough room inside so that you can slip on a few extra insulating layers.

Insulation A shell jacket without any insulation is the most versatile option. This allows you to add and remove insulation as and when you need it, meaning you can wear the jacket all year round.



Parámo Velez Adventure Smock £200

BEST
OUTFIT
WALKING



In a nutshell: A classic Parámo top that performs beautifully in cooler conditions.

An anomaly in the test, as this is the only jacket to use Nikwax Analogy waterproofing (and it's a smock). The top works in a similar way to animal fur, driving moisture out and away from the skin. The waterproofing is handled by a DWR coating on the face fabric. The coating retained its water repellence for a longer period than expected, and only really started to wet out in high abrasion areas around the back and shoulders. This is certainly not a top for warmer weather, though, and although the system works very well at drawing away sweat, it still remains warm inside. There are some vents and the wide, cuffed sleeves can be rolled up, but the bulky material is still warm. In wet and cooler conditions, it's hard to fault.

Sizes: S-XXL Materials: Analogy waterproof by Nikwax Weight: 764g Pockets: 2 Women's version: Yes Contact: 01892 786444; www.paramo.co.uk

Rab Stretch Neo £250

BEST
OUTFIT
WALKING



In a nutshell: An excellent, technical mountain jacket with state-of-the-art fabric technology.

Rab's first jacket to use Polartec's all-new Neoshell membrane. It's this element that is really key to the jacket's uniqueness. It claims to be much more breathable than other membrane equivalents. In use that certainly seems to be the case, and even on hard ascents on cold days there was no trace of condensation. Aside from the stretch fabric, this has the usual hallmarks of a well-built mountain jacket. The hood is decent with a wire-reinforced peak and it's plenty large enough for those with big heads, or wearing helmets. It also cinches down to size well with one-handed adjustment. The extra-long collar at the front is great at keeping the wind and chill out, with a fleece lining that means you can bury your face in it.

Sizes: S-XXL Materials: Polartec NeoShell Weight: 511g Pockets: 4 Women's version: Yes Contact: 01773 601870; www.rab.co.uk

Andy's verdict

For some, the thought of winter is a little depressing, with grey skies and wet weather getting in the way of a good walk. Not me. I've been scouring the weather forecasts and heading into the wettest weather I can find to give these jackets a run for their money.

Sometimes there's nothing better than getting out and showing Mother Nature who's boss, battering down the hatches and pushing on through the rain. Having said that, walking across the top of the North Yorkshire Moors in the midst of the tail end of Hurricane Katia wasn't the most pleasant experience. On the up side, the windproofing properties of these jackets were tested to their fullest.

Generally speaking, when it comes to winter waterproofs, it pays to spend a bit of extra cash. The extra money will give you membrane technology to improve overall performance. A three-layer membrane jacket is also a good option if you are planning on heading into the hills.

Neither the **Patagonia** or **Fjallraven** jackets use membrane technology. Although for most use this is fine, the extra security of a triple-layer of membrane underneath is useful for full winter use.

The **Regatta** jacket is a decent value bet for those not looking for any higher-level kit. The zip-out insulation layer is useful for more casual walks on colder days, so that you don't have to worry about layering up quite so much. For hill use, though, I would prefer the option to mix and match layers more.

The **Jack Wolfskin** and **Outdoor Research** jackets are higher-end technical jackets that work well all over the hills, although the scrim layer in the **Outdoor Research** and its incredible venting just gives it the edge.

The top two jackets are both outstanding, but very different. The **Parámo** smock works really well at keeping moisture away from the skin and is very soft to wear. It is a little too warm for more humid weather, though. That's why the **Rab** Neostretch just takes it. The new Polartec Neoshell fabric is very breathable and keeps moisture away. It even has a bit of stretch in it for good measure.



Kitted out for an...

AUTUMN WALK

All the leaves are brown, and the sky is grey... hey, that sounds like a good intro to a song. It also describes fairly accurately what's happening outside right now, so it's time to think about changing your gear around a bit...

JACKETS

Waterproofs are the name of the game here and it's time to think about something a little more rugged than a light weight pack-away shell. The chances are that you will need to be wearing your waterproof jacket more often than you won't, so it's always good to know that it will be able to last the distance. This top takes a very close runner's-up spot in the jacket test this month. It's a good bet for cooler autumn days, with its layers of fabric. Waterproofing and the adjustability of the hood are both very good.

Paramo Velez Adventure Smock £200
www.paramo.co.uk



BASE-LAYER

Essential for maintaining comfort year-round, base-layers will help to draw sweat away from the skin, keeping you cool in summer and warmer in autumn and winter. And tops made from merino wool are generally better at drawing away moisture. This top from Icebreaker is a great example and won our base-layer test back in the January issue.

Icebreaker Mondo Zip £60
www.icebreaker.com



GAITERS

Any long grass you encounter is liable to be very wet and there will be patches of mud. Gaiters will keep your lower legs dry without having to resort to a full overtrouser. You should also be able to save your walking trousers from too many trips to the washing machine. These are a classic example, with Gore-Tex providing the technicality and a drawcord to keep them up.

Trekmaters Sprint £35
www.trekmaters.co.uk

