

TESTED! WATERPROOF JACKETS

THE TEST:

By Tom Hutton & Steph Duits

We wore the jackets over various base and mid-layers and subjected them to the best of British rain on walks in Wales and the South West. Judging them on their suitability for year-round use, we awarded marks for comfort and fit and performance, including breathability and features such as hood design. Value for money was also considered. All weights are for the sizes tested.

BUY A WATERPROOF BREATHABLE JACKET IF...

You only own one waterproof and you want it to work in pretty much all conditions – summer and winter – and still last a few years. You don't climb too high or hard, so the extra weight's not a big issue to you and you don't mind leaving it at home altogether if the weather's really good.

JARGON BUSTER

Base-layer: Item of clothing usually worn next to the skin.

Breathability: Process where body moisture passes through materials.

Drawcord hem: Adjustable elastic system in jacket hem, for insulation and ventilation.

Handwarmer pockets: Pockets just above the hip, in a comfy position to keep your hands warm while walking.

Interactive (IA): Denotes a waterproof that

can be teamed up with a compatible zip-in fleece.

Pit zips: Zips under the arms for extra ventilation – particularly useful for more strenuous walking.

Polyester/polyamide/PU: Synthetic materials used in some fabrics.

Ripstop fabric: Identified by faint criss-cross lines in the material. It ensures any tear won't immediately spread across the panel.

Storm flap: Single or double strip of fabric protecting the main zip from rain. Can be positioned in front (external) or behind the zip (internal).

Taped seams: Waterproof tape on the seams for total waterproofness.

Volume adjuster: A means of altering the fit of your hood – usually via drawcords.

Wicking: The act of body moisture being drawn through clothing layers.

Wired peak: Hood peak reinforced with wire.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

FABRIC

This governs waterproofness and breathability. The more expensive jackets tend to be cut from top-end fabrics, such as Gore-Tex and eVENT, which do both jobs well. At lower prices you're more likely to see "own label" fabrics and, usually, a slight decrease in performance. Most of the jackets have a mesh lining (or similar), which will enhance comfort and increase longevity, but may make the jacket feel warmer. To be totally waterproof all seams should be taped. Ideally the fabric shouldn't rustle and it should be durable enough to withstand a few scrapes.

COLLAR, CUFFS AND HEM

Cuffs should be adjustable (usually via Velcro tabs) to keep bad weather out and also to aid ventilation. The hem should also have some kind of adjustment, usually drawcords.

POCKETS

Front handwarmer pockets should be protected by a storm flap and easy to access when wearing a rucksack. A pocket that can hold a map is useful, as is a small, secure, internal pocket for valuables.

HOOD

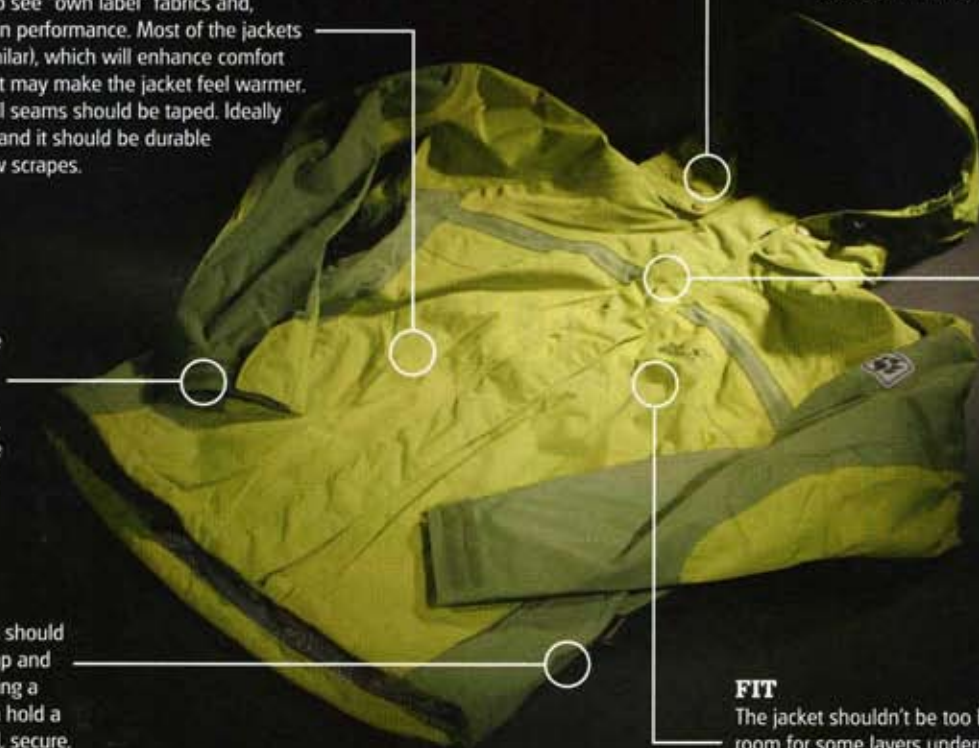
This should be adjustable with enough room for a hat underneath. Rollaway styles are neater and more convenient, but can make the collar feel bulky when stowed. A large chin guard, softened with a fleecy fabric, will feel great in very bad weather, and a stiffened peak is a godsend in windy conditions.

CLOSURE

Zips should be either totally waterproof, or protected by strips of fabric (in front or behind the zip) known as storm flaps. If they are external, they should be fastened with pop-studs or Velcro.

FIT

The jacket shouldn't be too baggy, but make sure there's room for some layers underneath, especially if you'll be wearing a thicker fleece in winter. Too tight and movement will be restricted, too loose and you'll lose out on breathability and warmth. Sleeves should cover the wrists and not ride up when you stretch.



THE NORTH FACE M ALL TERRAIN £150

TECHNICAL INFO

Colours: Deep water blue, asphalt grey, black

Sizes: S-XXL

Fabric: Gore-Tex Performance

Key features: Taped seams, adjustable hood, two handwarmer pockets, Velcro adjustable cuffs

Weight: 695g

Women's version: No

Contact: 01539 738882,

www.thenorthface.com/au



COMFORT & FIT 7/10

Roomy with long sleeves that were a little loose at the cuffs. A perfect hood, though, with excellent adjustment, and the soft two-layer Gore-Tex fabric was easy to move in and didn't rustle.

PERFORMANCE 8/10

With a top-notch hood and deep storm flap, keeping rain out was no problem and the Gore-Tex fabric was notably more breathable than most. Let down by pockets that were difficult to access with a pack on.

VERDICT 15/20

A smart, functional waterproof that looks conservative enough to wear in the High Street as well as the hills. Tough enough to last a while and good value, too.

BERGHAUS AURA £200

TECHNICAL INFO

Colours: Four including pillar box red/ash, mazarine blue/eclipse

Sizes: S-XXL

Fabric: Gore-Tex Pro Shell

Key features: Rollaway hood with wired peak and volume adjuster, map pocket, internal zipped mesh pocket, reinforced shoulders

Weight: 775g

Women's version: Yes

Contact: 0191 516 5700,

www.berghaus.com



COMFORT & FIT 8/10

A good fit with superb sleeves and plenty of adjustment. The hood was spot-on, too, with enough room for a hat when needed. Slightly more rustly than The North Face, but not a big problem.

PERFORMANCE 9/10

Superb in a downpour and the Gore-Tex Pro Shell fabric made it the most breathable next to the winner. Better hood and more accessible pockets than The North Face. A little pricey, though.

VERDICT 17/20

A good-looking, well-featured waterproof that's not too bulky or heavy to carry in a pack, yet breathes well enough for strenuous walking. Should last a while.

CW WINNER!

PARAMO CASCADA £180

TECHNICAL INFO

Colours: Eight, including chilli pepper, navy, forest and brown

Sizes: S-XXL

Fabric: Nikwax Analogy

Key features: Extra large map pocket, adjustable rollaway wired hood, two hand pockets

Weight: 870g

Women's version: Yes

Contact: 01892 786444,

www.paramo.co.uk



COMFORT & FIT 9/10

A great fit with well-designed sleeves and a good combination of Velcro and elastic at the cuffs. Hem and waist drawcords help fine-tune fit and I love the hood, which fitted me brilliantly and was easy to adjust. Comfort-wise, it's hard to knock the Cascada, which is cut from a wonderfully soft and rustle-free fabric making it a real pleasure to wear. Loses a mark as it's a little long for my liking, but this will suit some walkers.

PERFORMANCE 9/10

Similar weight and pack-down size to the two runners-up, but beats both hands down on breathability, making it far more pleasant to wear for more energetic walking. It proved very waterproof, coping well in some of the wettest Welsh weather, and the hood is nice and roomy so you can really bury yourself inside it, while the soft fabric means you can still hear what someone's saying! Loses a mark as the pockets are hard to get to with a pack on.



VERDICT 18/20

A well-designed, incredibly comfy jacket with exceptional breathability. Paramo often loses out to lightweight waterproofs, but against others of similar weight and bulk it's in a league of its own.