

# Five of the best

**TESTED**

# technical fleeces

Fleece has had an impressive makeover, from stretchy and sleek to weatherproof and breathable, Judy Armstrong trials technical fleeces

## TOP TIPS

» **FABRIC** Standard fleece is polyester. Technical fleece can have a nylon outer for durability, with a polyester inner face for warmth. It can have stretch side panels for body shaping and movement, or a stretch hood for extra warmth. Slick outer faces or membranes resist wind, a fluffy inner face traps air; both aid insulation.

» **CUFFS** Fleece is an insulation layer, so cuffs should be low bulk - ideally elastane-bound for wearing under an outer soft shell or waterproof jacket.

» **COLLAR** Check the height is compatible with an outer layer, ideally it'll be a little lower - and the zips don't clash. If your fleece has a hood, ensure it sits comfortably with an outer layer and your rucksack.

» **HEMS** The best are elastane bound, open shirt style or with a shockcord adjustment. Avoid chunky, wide elasticated hems, which increase bulk.

» **POCKETS** Hand-warmer pockets are often blocked by a pack hipbelt but are useful the rest of the time. A zipped chest, or, Napoleon pocket, is accessible when a pack's in place and handy for small stuff. Arm pockets are very small and of limited use.

**F**leece has had a facelift. Gone are the days of chunky jackets with lumpy cuffs and oversized zips. Today, fleece means smooth outer faces, lightly brushed inner, stretch fabrics or panels teamed with dinky zip pullers. It can mean high-loft fluffy creations, which trap air for maximum insulation, or close-cut stretch fibres for minimum bulk and maximum movement.

Fleece has always been a favoured insulation layer,

but as other fibres advance - for example, the synthetic insulation options tested last issue - so fleece has moved on too. Here, we look at fleece with a technical edge: with hoods, stretch, loft and windproofing. Of course, you can still buy a basic fleece jacket for peanuts in a bargain basement sale, but as outdoor photographers we're looking at performance and protection, not compromise for minimum cash.

## PÁRAMO Taiga

**£140**

Taiga is difficult to categorise as it doesn't look or feel like a fleece jacket. It features Páramo's polyester 'pump liner', which deals with moisture coming in and out, and a brushed polyester outer, which is soft, vaguely fleecy and quiet. This combination makes Taiga highly breathable, water and wind repellent, and more of an outer jacket than an insulation layer, although there is no hood to protect against rain. It has a roomy cut and is comfortable to wear, but heavy and bulky in a pack. Photographer-friendly pockets - inside, chest and below the waist - are cavernous and zipped. All openings are adjustable against weather: cuffs have elastic and poppers, the high collar and hem have shockcord and the front zip is protected by a studded flap. This is a great garment for active use in cool/cold weather, but it's too warm for mild conditions, bulky, and tricky to layer under a waterproof.

Páramo » 01892 786444 » [www.paramo.co.uk](http://www.paramo.co.uk)

### THE LOWDOWN

**Fabric** Nikwax Analogy Fleece

**Sizes** XS-XXL

**Weight** 865g (men's L)

### RATINGS

Weight/bulk	75%
Warmth	90%
Design/features	90%
Value	85%

**Overall** **85%**

