

# RAINJACKETS

If there's one piece of outdoor gear you need to get right, it's your waterproof. **Simon Birch** and **Gemma Hall** put the latest models through their paces.

**WE ALL KNOW** that horrible feeling – you're halfway through a long walk when the heavens open and gradually you get soaked through. But this needn't be the case any longer, as clothing manufacturers have invested a lot of money to develop jackets that keep you dry in even the soggiest of conditions.

With so many rainjackets out there to choose from, how do you know which is right for the job? First, decide what sort of activity you'll be doing. If you plan to follow low-level trails in spring and summer, then a lightweight waterproof will be fine. If, on the other hand, you want to venture onto higher, more exposed terrain in all four seasons, you'll be looking for what's

known as a 'mountain hard shell'. These are tough jackets that give you much-needed protection from both wind and rain.

Head to your nearest decent outdoor shop and try on a number of jackets – it's vital to pick one that fits well. You'll find a bewildering array of fabrics on offer, but don't be put off. While these all work in a slightly different way, they're designed to do the same thing: namely, keep rain out and stop the build-up of sweat and moisture on the inside.

All of the jackets we tested work well, and most offer a long guarantee, so with any luck your days of getting wet while enjoying the great outdoors are over.

## THE EXPERTS



Keen hill walker Simon Birch never ceases to be amazed by how rainjackets just keep getting better. When he's not tramping across the uplands, Simon writes on environmental issues.



Gemma Hall is a freelance journalist based in the North East, and enjoys hiking in the Pennines. She has completed many long-distance trails, both at home and abroad.

## HOW WE TESTED THEM

### TECHNICAL DETAILS

How much does the jacket weigh? What sort of fabric is it made from? Does it have a lining?

**WHAT'S IT LIKE?** How many pockets does the jacket have? What are the fit and cut like? Does it have pit zips (see below)?

**PERFORMANCE** How did the jacket perform on our test walks?

**ETHICAL RATING** Where is the jacket made? Is the manufacturer a member of the European Outdoor Group's Association for Conservation (AFC), a trade body supporting environmental projects? For more details, visit [www.eogconservation.org](http://www.eogconservation.org).

**VALUE FOR MONEY** Does the quality of the jacket justify its price tag?

## What to look for

### Hood

A snug-fitting hood is essential. Some visors are reinforced with wire so the hood can be shaped around your face.

### Cut

Mid-length jackets work best as they provide a weathertight overlap with waterproof trousers.

### Storm flap

Look for a high-cut storm flap that will protect your lower face from driving wind, rain or snow.

### Drawcords

These need to be tucked away neatly to prevent snagging, and simple enough to use with gloves on.

### Pit zips

Features such as pit zips under the arms and adjustable cuffs can help to regulate your temperature without you having to stop and discard a layer.

### Pockets

You'll need large pockets for your map, compass, phone and emergency rations. Make sure they're easily accessible while wearing a daypack.

### Sleeves

Ensure the sleeves are long enough not to ride up, exposing your wrists and arms.

## JARGON BUSTER

The variety of breathable fabrics has increased in recent years. Here's some top names to look for:

» **Gore-Tex** The original breathable fabric. A nylon or polyester outer shell gives waterproofing, while a porous inner membrane allows sweat to escape from the body.

» **eVENT** This hi-tech fabric uses a new type of inner membrane that's claimed to offer millions of tiny pores, improving breathability.

» **H<sub>2</sub>No** Developed by Patagonia, this fabric comes in several weights for use in different climates and weather conditions.





## RAB Bergen

£180

☎ 01773 601870; www.rab.uk.com

- » **Technical details** eVENT fabric; 500g.
- » **What's it like?** Two map-sized external pockets and one smaller, mesh-lined internal pocket. Adjustable wire-peak hood. Medium length. No pit zips.
- » **Performance** A good-fitting jacket that proved to be totally dependable on the test walk. My only criticism is that its ventilation would benefit from pit zips.
- » **Ethical rating** Member of AFC. Made in China.
- » **Value for money** This one won't let you down. It's an excellent buy. **8.5/10**



## PÁRAMO Valez Adventure Smock

£180

☎ 01892 786444; www.paramo.co.uk

- » **Technical details** Waterproof Analogy fabric; 700g.
- » **What's it like?** Same excellent fabric as the Pájaro (right), but otherwise very different due to its short cut and pull-over style. Two map-sized pockets. Side vents at the bottom.
- » **Performance** The most versatile jacket tested. It was great on a long walk, and also on my bike. The vents on each side cooled me rapidly.
- » **Ethical rating** AFC member. Made in Colombia.
- » **Value for money** One jacket, many uses. **9/10**

## MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT

### Kongur £260

☎ 0161 366 5020;  
www.mountain-equipment.co.uk

- » **Technical details** Gore-Tex Pro Shell fabric; 540g.
- » **What's it like?** A brilliantly designed jacket with everything you need when the weather turns foul: four large, map-sized external pockets, an excellent adjustable hood that gives 100 per cent protection, pit zips, and a generous, long cut.
- » **Performance** Though all the jackets in this test will protect you from the elements, the Kongur stands out for the attention to detail that's gone into its design. Full marks for including enough decent-sized pockets – two that act as hand-warmers and two more for storing those things you need to get at easily on a walk. Plus, the adjusters on the sleeves are made from chunky plastic, so they are a cinch to use with gloved hands.
- » **Ethical rating** Unfortunately, not a member of AFC. Made in Hungary.

» **Value for money** This is a totally bomb-proof jacket. It's the most expensive tested, but has the Gore-Tex lifetime guarantee so it should give you many years of protection. **9/10**

**Wildlife**  
ON TEST  
**WINNER**



## PÁRAMO Pájaro £250

☎ 01892 786444; www.paramo.co.uk

- » **Technical details** Waterproof Analogy fabric; 740g.
- » **What's it like?** Páramo say their jackets are inspired by otter fur, with superb insulating,

water-repelling and moisture-wicking properties. Sounds too good to be true?

Not with the Pájaro. This soft jacket also features pit zips and pockets galore: two map-sized ones at the chest, one internal, and two at the hip – perfect for stashing small binoculars.

- » **Performance** The superb Pájaro was designed with wildlife watchers in mind and I found the camouflage colour a definite bonus. Drawcords in all the right places ensured a perfect fit. It is a heavy jacket, but this was compensated by the fact that I didn't need an insulating underlayer. It really excelled in cold, rainy weather – I stayed warm and dry, and the comfy hood (best on test) moved with my head. My top choice for autumn and winter.

» **Ethical rating** Member of AFC. Made in Colombia.

» **Value for money** Páramos are renowned for lasting years, so this is well worth its hefty price tag.

**9.5/10**



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