

YOUR GEAR OF THE YEAR



The votes have been counted and your judgement passed. These are officially the best products, destinations and retailers for walkers as decided by you, the reader. Cameron McNeish casts his eye over the winners of this year's walk Reader Awards and finds your choices both refreshing and infuriating.

What a fascinating set of results. As editor of one of the UK's major outdoor magazines I'm a confirmed industry watcher and over the years I've seen a growth in the number of companies making and selling outdoor gear. American companies like The North Face, Mountain Hardware, Marmot and GoLite have all successfully embraced the UK market, as have other European brands like Haglöfs, Deuter or Vaude. Amazingly, not one of these overseas brands has

been mentioned in the awards. Indeed, **walk** readers appear to buy only from a very small group of manufacturers, which suggests to me that you probably buy a waterproof, a pair of boots and a day sack, and hang on to them for a long time. It also suggests you are content with your gear and probably replace it with a similar model from the same manufacturer. In today's materialistic society that's a very refreshing trend, and I congratulate you wholeheartedly, even if it's not the kind of news the outdoors industry might want to hear!

Best Walking Boot/Shoe

1ST SCARPA 2ND BRASHER 3RD MEINDL

A reversal of roles from last year, with Scarpa shooting from third to first place. I must admit to some surprise here. I would have thought the vast majority of you would have favoured Brasher, who appear in second place once again. But perhaps this is a reflection of their recent move away from their traditional lightweight walking boots to higher-ankle, beefier mountain boots. Interestingly, this is one of the very few gear categories where **walk** readers don't buy British. But then again, the traditions of boot manufacture on the continent, particularly in Italy and Germany, probably ensures excellence. And there is little doubt that Scarpa encompasses such excellence, whether you wear their lightweight trail shoes, as I do, their mid-weight walking boots or their stiffer-soled mountaineering boots.



Best Walking Trousers

1ST ROHAN 2ND CRAGHOPPERS 3RD PÁRAMO

Interesting to see the ever-popular Páramo brand make it into the top three, and Rohan move into top spot over last year's winner, Craghoppers. I remember wearing some of the very early Rohan trousers about 30 years ago when the founder of the company, the late Paul Howcroft, took the outdoor world by storm. But more recently Rohan have appeared to move further and further into the travel market. It's fascinating to see you've voted them into top spot - **walk** readers must be a much-travelled bunch! I've worn many, many pairs of Rohan pants through the years and they've never let me down, and more recently Páramo Cascada trousers have become my number-one choice for winter hillwalking.



Best Walking Sock

1ST BRIDGEDALE 2ND SMARTWOOL 3RD BRASHER

Wow! For the fourth year running Bridgedale socks have been favoured by **walk** readers and the ever-popular Smartwool socks move into second place. I wonder how much of Bridgedale's popularity is down to their availability. It appears to me that you can buy Bridgedale socks almost everywhere and they are certainly less pricey than the all-wool Smartwool socks, which, I must admit, I personally favour. The wool/nylon blends that Bridgedale use provide a greater durability, which might also be a factor to be taken into consideration. So, well done Bridgedale!



Best Walking Book

1ST CICERONE GUIDES 2ND WAINWRIGHT BOOKS (FRANCES LINCOLN) 3RD CLASSIC WALKS IN BRITAIN (AA BOOKS)



The power of television! With all the televised brouhaha of Wainwright's centenary year it really doesn't surprise me to see Frances Lincoln's Wainwright books come out in second place, although I have written elsewhere that the company is milking Wainwright's memory so much that I wouldn't be surprised if the great man is spinning in his grave. It hasn't, though, knocked Ciccone out of the top spot and I'm personally delighted about that. I've said many times before that Ciccone offer a fantastic service to walkers and backpackers and it seems you can just about buy a Ciccone walking guide to virtually any trail or walking region in the world - and all of a very high standard. I reckon Ciccone is the kind of company that we walkers and backpackers really couldn't do without.



Best Waterproof Jacket

1ST BERGHAUS 2ND PÁRAMO 3RD LOWE ALPINE

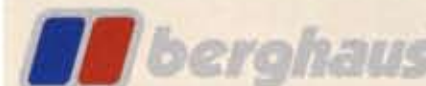
Much the same outcome as the fleece category, which shows what a traditionalist bunch you are. Where are all the Marmots, the Go-Lites, the Arc'teryx, the Rabs, the Montanes, the North Faces, the Haglöfs and the rest? This year, Berghaus finishes with their nose in front of Páramo and I guess that's also a vote of confidence for Gore-Tex - the waterproof/breathable fabric that Berghaus uses for the vast majority of their waterproofs. Interestingly, this year Berghaus have taken their own waterproof fabric, Aquafoil, and have completely revamped its face fabrics. The result is a fantastic range of lower-priced waterproof jackets and soft shells that look superb, and work pretty well too.



Best Fleece

1ST BERGHAUS 2ND LOWE ALPINE AND PÁRAMO

Do walkers still wear fleeces? Haven't we all succumbed to the marketing hype and swathed ourselves in soft shell? Apparently not, and it doesn't surprise me to see Berghaus and Lowe Alpine - two of your favourite outdoor brands and prodigious manufacturers of all kinds of fleeces, from thin microfleece to heavy windproof fabrics - appear again in the top three. Páramo is a bit of a surprise, as the company isn't really recognized as a fleece manufacturer but as I suggest below, I suspect many of you have bought into the whole of Páramo's clothing system.



Best Base Layer

1ST PÁRAMO 2ND BERGHAUS 3RD HELLY HANSEN

I'm amazed that with the plethora of base layers that are available, **walk** readers have voted for exactly the same top three brands as last year. The only difference is that Páramo has edged clear at the top. Perhaps you're a traditionalist bunch, or maybe Helly Hansen Lifa has a nostalgic ring to it, (we used to call them Smelly Hellies because they ponged after a day's use). Berghaus is undoubtedly a very popular brand among you, but I suspect Páramo's base layers are being increasingly seen as an important part of Páramo's Directional Clothing System. Páramo garments use innovative fabrics that are designed to actively "direct" water (liquid water as well as water vapour) to where you need it to keep you comfortable. This works particularly well with the reversible, next-to-the-skin Páramo base layers.

