

# 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 slowly 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, confirm 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. On the other hand, if you want to venture onto higher, more exposed terrain in all four seasons, you'll be

looking at what's known as a 'mountain hard shell'. These are tough jackets that give you much-needed protection from both the wind and the 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 you dry from rain on the outside and from 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)? This is 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 wire-reinforced so the hood can be shaped around your face.

### Cut

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

### JARGON BUSTER

The variety of breathable fabrics has grown 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.



### Storm flap

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

### Drawcords

These need to be neatly tucked away 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 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

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

MEN'S  
JACKETS



BERGHAUS

Axis £200

☎ 0191 516 5700; www.berghaus.com

- » **Technical details** Gore-Tex Pro Shell fabric; 498g.
- » **What's it like** Two large external pockets and one smaller, mesh-lined internal pocket. Medium length. No pit zips.
- » **Performance** This is a solid, hard-wearing jacket that breezed through its test walk, giving me total protection from heavy showers. My only gripe is the lack of pit zips that can make the jacket a tad warm.
- » **Ethical rating** Member of AFC. Made in China.
- » **Value for money** A dependable buy. **8.5/10**



MONTANE

Venture £160

☎ 01670 522300; www.montane.co.uk

- » **Technical details** eVENT fabric; 525g.
- » **What's it like** Two large map-sized external pockets but no internal ones. The back is cut longer to cover your entire backside. No pit zips.
- » **Performance** A well-made jacket that's let down only by the lack of a hood adjuster and pit zips, and the shortage of handy pockets.
- » **Ethical rating** Not a member of AFC. Made in China.
- » **Value for money** As the cheapest jacket tested, this is great value. **8/10**



PATAGONIA

Storm £190

☎ 0800 026 0055; www.patagonia.com

- » **Technical details** H<sub>2</sub>No fabric and breathable mesh lining; 799g.
- » **What's it like** Two small external pockets, a smaller, mesh-lined inner pocket and an inner security pocket. Shorter cut than the other jackets. With pit zips.
- » **Performance** Kept me dry, but the pockets are not accessible when wearing a daypack and are too small for a map.
- » **Ethical rating** AFC member. Made in Vietnam.
- » **Value for money** Probably best for autumn hillwalking. **6.5/10**

WOMEN'S  
JACKETS



BERGHAUS

Auro £200

☎ 0191 516 5700; www.berghaus.com

- » **Technical details** Gore-Tex Pro Shell fabric; 650g.
- » **What's it like** Full-length jacket with five pockets. The hood is designed for foul weather and will zip up over your nose. No pit zips.
- » **Performance** I felt cocooned in the Auro and was exceptionally well protected during a fierce downpour. Perhaps too technical for some, with several drawcords and seven zips.
- » **Ethical rating** Member of AFC. Made in China.
- » **Value for money** This is a fair price for a great winter jacket. **8.5/10**



THE NORTH FACE

Primavera £190

☎ 01539 738882; www.thenorthface.com

- » **Technical details** Two-layer Gore-Tex fabric; 600g.
- » **What's it like** A compact, hip-length jacket made from soft, rustle-free fabric. One wrist and two front pockets, though neither is large enough for a map. Long pit zips.
- » **Performance** I loved the sleek design and snug fit. The hood performed very well and the generous pit zips kept me cool.
- » **Ethical rating** Member of AFC. Made in China.
- » **Value for money** Quite pricey, but an excellent multi-use jacket. **8.5/10**



RAB

Vidda £180

☎ 01773 601870; www.rab.uk.com

- » **Technical details** Three-layer eVENT fabric with no internal lining; 460g.
- » **What's it like** Uncomplicated design with one internal and two external pockets. Extremely lightweight. No pit zips.
- » **Performance** If I was climbing a Scottish mountain in bad weather, this is what I'd like to wear. The hood hugged my head well, and the sealed outer pocket kept my map and GPS dry.
- » **Ethical rating** Member of AFC. Made in China.
- » **Value for money** Good as a lightweight and storm-proof piece of kit. **9/10**



## RAB Bergen **£180**

☎ 01773 601870; [www.rab.uk.com](http://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. Medium length. No pit zips.
- » **Performance** A good-fitting jacket that proved to be totally dependable on the test walk. My main 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](http://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](http://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 should give you many years of protection. **9/10**



## PÁRAMO Pájaro **£250**

☎ 01892 786444; [www.paramo.co.uk](http://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. Sound 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 worth its hefty price tag.

**9.5/10**

