Clothing
(Hiking and Hill-Walking)

The following information has been researched and compiled by the author and owner of BGMA. The author has studied this area of mountain walking and hiking for well over 10 years and is keen to pass on his knowledge and understanding of various products.

There are very few areas of recreation/leisure that have developed quicker and in greater detail than that of the clothing in which we wear whilst hill-walking or climbing.

Simply using different retail outlets you will be bombarded with the latest technology and the newest gadgets, whilst everything has its place below we tried to summarize the main points that you should look for when purchasing new kit.

Waterproof Jacket

This should:

- keep out wind and water so must have a fully waterproof outer shell
- let out water vapour. *(Products based on Gore-Tex®, Triple Point® or Sympatex and Nikwax perform well in this respect.)*
- have a hood large enough to pull up while wearing a hat.
- have a storm flaps over zips or waterproof zips
- be big enough to wear over several layers of clothing

Inner Clothing

Several thin layers is better than one thick one. The key here is to be able to adjust your layers to suit your workload.

It is pointless becoming sweaty and weary during a period of exertion only to shiver from cold when resting, as the perspiration subsequently produces a 'refrigeration' effect.

Build up several layers comprised of wool and/or some man-made materials but NOT cotton.

Hat/Balaclava

In winter a significant amount of heat loss is from the head – ranging from 60 – 80%.

Ski hats and/or balaclavas can help significantly in maintaining the overall body temperature. In the summer, an exposed head can cause over heating - a hat will help protect your head.

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Mittens/Gloves

Hands are probably the most difficult part of the body to keep both warm and dry - particularly as many tasks can only be completed after removing your gloves or mittens.

Nonetheless, the best approach here is to have at least two layers:

- a warm/thin inner layer together with
- a waterproof outer layer

Mittens are better for keeping your hands warm but makes some task difficult to perform. If your gloves/mittens get wet, a spare pair of socks make good mittens.

Boots

BGMA TIP!

"Walking Boots should be like a good friend. Supportive without being irritating"

In an ideal world, you would have different boots to suit all the different terrains and conditions that can be encountered when hiking in the UK.

However, this could prove too expensive for most people. Therefore, your boots will have to perform in a range of circumstances. Inevitably, this involves some trade-off between features necessary for winter, high level walking and less challenging, summer, low level walking.

As with most things in life, you get what you pay for.

When choosing a pair of boots ensure that:

- they are waterproof
- the sole has a good tread and is made of a material that offers good adhesive properties - like rubber. PVC should be avoided
- the sides of the boot are high enough to support your ankle
- the toe and heel has additional strengthening to give extra protection
- the insole and upper lining is padded to give firm but comfortable support to the whole foot

- they have a scree cuff (a padded section that surrounds the top of the ankle) and padded tongue to prevent small stones, debris and water from getting into the boot

- the boots have 'D' rings and/or hooks rather than eyelets (much easier to adjust with cold fingers) A 'locking' hook aids lacing.

Get your boots from a specialist shop - and take your time over choosing and fitting. Either wear your own hiking socks or borrow some from the shop when trying boots.

Fitting should be snug but not overly tight (if boots are too tight, your feet are liable to get cold).

You should be able to wiggle your toes without your toes touching the front of the boot. To test this, try putting a finger down the back of the boot. This should push your toes forward so that they just touch the front of the boot.

General hill-walking does not require a particularly stiff sole unless you are intending to attach crampons. However too much flexibility will not provide adequate protection to the feet.

Tell the shop's boot expert what kind of walking you are intending to do and they should be able to advise.

Understanding the 'Seasons' Ratings

1-2 Season Walking Boots Low Level Walking

For use in spring/summer conditions, on firm low level paths that are not particularly steep. Footwear in this category is designed to offer relatively more flexibility and often comes in the form of low-cut boots or shoes.

3 Season Walking Boots Hill-walking/Trekking

For use on paths that are much rockier and steeper than those encountered in low level walking and where you will be walking all year round and in most weathers except snow & ice. These boots can be made from leather or fabric usually have a waterproof liner. The sole and ankle cuff will be designed to provide a good level of support and the boot will be waterproof and will have aggressively treaded soles to provide good grip in rough terrain. The overall support provided for feet and ankles will be enough should you be carrying a full backpack.

4 Season Walking Boots Winter Walking

For use when you're likely to encounter snow/ice. These boots will be stiffer (longitudinally and laterally) than Hill-walking/trekking boots and so can take crampons for short periods of time. The overall level of support offered is enough for use when carrying a heavier pack on longer backpacking trips.

Mountain/Mountaineering Boots

There are 2 further categories of highly technical footwear designed for use in the high mountains where snow and ice exist all the year round, on glaciers or when climbing. These categories are outside the scope of this gear guide.

Materials Used

For most of us, the purchase of a jacket represents a significant investment. So just how can you discriminate between the increasing array of products available. Here are some ideas on the criteria you could apply in making your choice.

Probably the most well established fabric technology is **Gore-Tex®**. Gore-Tex® is a registered trade mark of W.L. Gore and Associates, a company based in Maryland, USA. Gore-Tex is a thin film of Teflon (PTFE) based material. Waterproof and breathable, it is usually bonded to a nylon layer of some kind (often a ripstop or taffeta). This is referred to as 'two ply' construction. Another layer may be bonded to the other side of the Gore-Tex® film so that the PTFE is sandwiched in the middle of a three layer laminate ('three ply'). This third layer is usually some very light, open weave material (typically nylon tricot) to keep weight down and maximize vapor transmission.

Triplepoint® Ceramic is a registered trademark of Lowe Alpine. It is a breathable coating applied to nylon face fabrics and absorbed into the weave of the fabric.

Sympatex® is a membrane technology based on a non-porous polymeric structure. It provides high levels of protection from wind and rain and is breathable. It can be laminated to most types of textile.

Clothing made from **Nikwax Directional Fabrics®** are designed to keep off the rain and pump water away from your skin, protecting your insulation and keeping you warm and dry. These fabrics can be indefinitely renewed by caring for them with Nikwax products while the fabric itself remains very soft, pliable and lightweight.

In addition to the above, many of the major manufacturers now have their own proprietary fabric technology delivering waterproofing and breathability. The fabrics available differ in how they feel (stiff vs soft) which may affect their weight and durability. A stiffer fabric may be more resistant to damage but may be heavier.

Overall Design

A jacket that opens all the way down the front offers greater flexibility in terms of ventilation than one that pulls over the head - particularly when wearing a backpack. However, the front opening represents a weak point in preventing water penetration so storm flaps are essential.

Fit

Needless to say, the jacket must fit properly. It should allow you to wear a number of layers under it, including a fleece, but shouldn't be so baggy it reduces the effectiveness of the moisture control. It shouldn't be too long, restricting your movement, or too short, where it can ride up and expose your back. Devices for adjusting the fit, such as waist drawcords, should be in the right place for your particular body length - particularly important for women.

Zips

Zips have two functions - to provide access and to help ventilation. Ventilation control can be further improved with underarm zips, but to be really useful, these need to be easy to access while you're wearing your backpack or rucksack. Some jackets also include internal zips to allow the fitting of a 'compatible' fleece. This may not be that useful if you want to 'delayer' quickly. (See Clothing section in Hill Skills.) Zips must be waterproof and this is usually achieved with a Storm Flap. However, a less bulky alternative (especially for underarm zips) is the use of a water resistant zipper - but water resistance does not mean waterproof!

Pockets

As a minimum there should be a pocket which can hold your map and compass plus somewhere to put your hands. It's worthwhile checking that you can access the pockets when wearing a belted backpack. Pockets should have storm flaps to reduce the chance of rain getting inside. Aside from this, number and location is down to personal preference.

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Hood

The key consideration here is that the hood adequately covers the head whilst you are wearing a suitable hat. Hoods which incorporate a plastic 'stiffener' round the face opening helps the hood retain its shape. Draw strings will help keep out the worst of the weather. You should also look at the face guards on the hood. Do they provide good protection when fastened? Is there a gap between the face guard and the collar where water can penetrate? Does the face guard flap round annoyingly when undone?

Whether the jacket has a hood which is fixed (permanently out) or one which can be detached or rolled away is a matter of preference. Generally speaking, the fixed hood will provide better overall protection but may mean that the jacket is less acceptable for more casual use.

Cuffs and Collar

Cuffs should have a means of tightening and loosening - like drawstrings or Velcro®. The collar should be able to be fastened right up under the chin and be integral with the hood's face guard.

Care and Maintenance

Jackets usually come with care instructions supplied by the manufacturer. The instructions will advise on how to wash and dry the jacket. Most will include guidance on how you can reproof the fabric. Reproofing will usually be necessary after a few years although this depends on how often you've used the jacket and the quality of the material. The first sign that you need to reproof will be the appearance of wet patches on the outside of the garment. (This is often referred to as 'wetting out'.) It will appear as if the jacket is leaking but in most cases this is not the case. When the water repellent fails, water builds up on the outside of the fabric. This reduces the breathability of the fabric allowing water vapor to build up on the inside of the jacket. Eventually this soaks the clothing next to your skin.

Allowing dirt or grime to build up on the surface of the fabric will also reduce breathability and produce the same effect. Keeping your jacket clean is also very important.

BGMA TIP!

Jacket colour is down to personal preference - but bright colours are a lot easy to spot by the emergency services!