

NATIONAL

Backcountry

The Gear Closet »

Foul Weather Friends

With blink-and-you'll-miss-it short days and wet weather upon us for the next several months, it's time to look at some jackets that will take us from the city, to the slopes, to the trail. The manufacturers and the big fancy magazines will tell you that you need a special jacket for each pursuit, but these do-all pieces might have you thinking otherwise.

Patagonia Ascensionist jacket, \$250

This jacket is a hybrid soft-shell combination, though rather than the commonly seen hard-shell/soft-shell pairing, Patagonia has used two types of soft-shell fabrics. A "harder," less stretchy hood and shoulder area protects against the weather where it hits the hardest, while a stretchier weave allows total range of motion in the arms and torso areas. The cut and quality are consistent with what we've come to expect from this brand, best exemplified in the total adjustability of the hood. All of the external seams are welded, making for a clean silhouette and quicker drying times. The pockets are huge and will hold a pair of climbing skins for backcountry skiing.

I was caught in a multiday storm with this jacket, and it served me quite well. I only wish I'd had a pair of pants just like it.

Outdoor Research Mithril jacket, \$199

Outdoor Research's Mithril jacket has been around for many seasons, but it somehow escaped my scrutiny until now. The sole traditional soft-shell entry to the test, this jacket held its own in terms of performance against



The Patagonia Ascensionist's stretchy weave gives you range of motion.



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Test 'Em »

When it comes to rainy places, the Olympic Peninsula's forests are right up there in world rankings, but there are some drizzly sites Cascade side, too.

Rainy Places (with average yearly rainfall)

Quinault
135 inches

Forks
122 inches

Paradise
120 inches

Skykomish
110 inches

Snoqualmie Pass
100 inches

Rattlesnake Lake
99 inches

Data collected by
Mark Canizaro.

Source: University
of Washington
Department of
Atmospheric
Sciences

the competition. The heavy fabric provides both warmth and protection from the elements, and the fuzzy fleece lining does not feel clammy against the skin. The cut of the body is excellent, though the sleeves are a touch baggy, and the cuffs could use some refining. The hood is adequate, though it could use an adjustment point in the back.

This is a jacket that I might not wear around town; its simple design is really all business.

REI Kulshan (for women) & Shuksan (for men) jackets, \$299

When I got this jacket in the mail, I was a bit shocked at the color. I'd call it "fire engine red," but it's brighter than that. I wore the Kulshan over hill and dale, and every time I wore it, I got compliments. People would touch the fabric covetously and then express great surprise upon finding out this jacket was plain ol' REI. There's a designer there that has a special flair for jackets, and the result here reflects that. The fit is precise; the details are standout.

Inside the left hand warmer pocket, there's a secure inner pocket for your MP3 player, and on the women's jacket at least, radically angled sleeve hems provide maximum protection coupled with mobility. Oh yeah, and maximum style! Nothing needs to be said about eVent fabric that hasn't already been said elsewhere—it's the most successful waterproof/breathable fabric technology to hit the market ... ever.

One additional feature worth mentioning: the integrated Recco reflector. This passive diode reflector can assist in locating its wearer in the unlikely case of an avalanche. The Recco does not replace avalanche training or beacons, but it can help increase backcountry safety at no inconvenience to the wearer. What's not to like about that? ♦



Hiker Pam Roy at Ruby Beach.

For more places to test your rain gear,
see her article on page 28.



OR's Mithril Storm Shell's heavy fabric keeps you warm as well as dry.



The REI Kulshan & Shuksan jackets get style points for the cut and kudos for a great waterproof fabric.