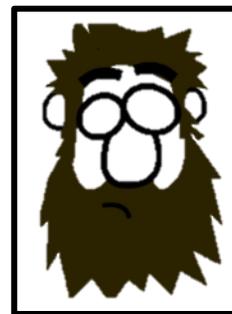


Uncle Wacko's Gear Corner



TRAMPING GEAR ADVICE FROM THE EXPERT

A bit about rain jackets

Here's a couple of things you need to know about buying a rain jacket.

'WATERPROOF BREATHABLE MATERIALS' IS AN OXYMORON

If you're scratching your head over that one, let's just say it's bollocks. A contradiction in terms. Like an easy 1000m climb, a gentle gale force wind, a harmless avalanche.

Sure, waterproof materials can be a *bit* breathable, and breathable materials might keep out a *bit* of moisture. But if you want something to be waterproof, don't expect it to breathe much. And if something breathes well, it's not going to keep a decent downpour out.

The idea you can have a jacket that somehow keeps all the rain out and at the same time miraculously ships all your pent-up body heat to the outside is a massive con by the garment manufacturing industry. Don't believe a word of it.

Sure, they might manage it in ideal conditions – just the right temperature, minimal exertion, easy terrain. A gentle winter stroll on a beach in your flashy Kathmandu urban wear, maybe.

But as soon as you chuck a pack on your back, get a sniff of a hill, up the pace, or start flailing about on a gnarly bush track, she's a different story.

In practice the exertion of normal tramping will quickly overwhelm the breathability of a waterproof jacket.

A RAIN JACKET ISN'T JUST ABOUT KEEPING RAIN OUT

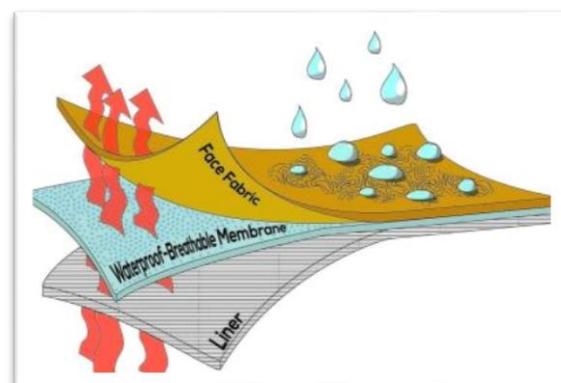
If you think it is, big mistake!

Uncle Wacko's mum used to say horses sweat, men perspire and women glow. Yeah right! Trampers are all horses, then.

Trampers sweat. Some not so much, others buckets. For us, managing sweat is a big deal.

Why?

Moisture isn't the problem. Skin is waterproof, after all. We don't bloat up like a puffer fish and start blobbing down the track when we get wet.



Wpb materials are great in theory, not so good in practice

No, the tramper's enemy is cold - that's where we can get into strife.

Which means you need to think of your rain jacket as part of your system for not getting cold. And a sure fire way of getting cold is to retain moisture next to your skin in cold weather.

There are two aspects to avoiding that. Firstly not letting water in from the outside – so waterproof rainwear.

Secondly, moving sweat away from your body to the outside. That means using wicking base and mid layers to draw your sweat to the outer surface of those layers.

But it ain't much use if your rain jacket then traps all that moisture inside the jacket. As you continue to sweat you'll just get wetter and colder. *Nek minnit* you'll be hypothermic, which won't make your mum very happy.

So you don't want your jacket acting like an iron lung or Fort Knox.

You need ventilation, and plenty of it. Uncle Wacko wouldn't even consider buying a rain jacket without pit zips – ever! And he's constantly amazed that otherwise good gear manufacturers keep churning out jackets without them (we're looking at you Macpac – what are you trying to do, become a Kathmandu clone fashionista supplier!?)

You also want storm flaps over front and pocket zips. They'll let you unzip for extra ventilation without letting the rain in.

Pit zips and storm flaps do add a bit of weight. But the extra control they give over your body temperature in the rain is way more important than a few extra grams.

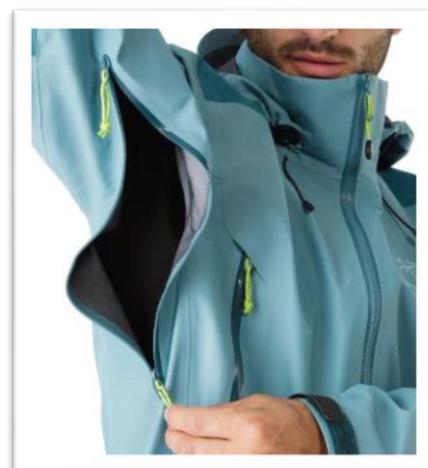
And a final thing – don't buy a jacket with a liner. Not unless you're heading into genuinely cold temperatures. A liner just reduces the already minimal breathability of your jacket and makes you warmer and so sweat more. Use layers if you need more insulation.

So you want a 2.5 layer jacket, not 3 layer.

That'll do for now. Next month, more pointers on buying a rain jacket that'll do you proud in the back country.

Spot ya.

Uncle Wacko



Pit zips – why would you ever buy a jacket without them?!