

# WHAT TO WEAR

## Layering

The secret to staying warm, dry and comfortable on an expedition is to adopt a layering principal with your clothes. Each layer performs a different task and layers can be put on or taken off as the conditions change. You need clothes that enable body sweat to evaporate otherwise you end up wet. Being wet leads to heat loss and this coupled with fatigue can lead to exposure. It is important, therefore that you wear the right clothes on your expedition.

## Base Layer

The purpose of the base layer is to move sweat from your skin and evaporate. It should be quick drying and very breathable. Cotton is not a good fabric as once wet it stays wet and does not breathe. Modern base layers are made from synthetic fabrics. These are light and pack up very small. Their main drawbacks are that they tend to smell. Be very sceptical of manufacturers' claims about eliminating odour. A natural fabric used as a base layer is merino wool. This has the advantage that it does not smell. You can wear one for up to 2 weeks without washing it. It gets wetter than synthetic fabric but is comfortable to wear. You will need to sell your Xbox to buy one though.



*"...people do not decide to become extraordinary. They decide to accomplish extraordinary things..."*

*Sir Edmund Hillary 1919-2008*

## Mid Layer

The purpose of the mid layer is to keep you warm. Fabrics tend to have an open weave to trap lots of air. They are not windproof, however, and need an outer layer to keep the wind from blowing away all that trapped warm air. Modern fabrics such as fleece are very popular and come in a wide variety of thicknesses, colours and designs. Fleece dries quickly and can be very warm. Wool, as a natural fabric, can be used as a mid layer. It is not as warm as fleece for the same weight of fabric, doesn't pack up very small and most importantly takes ages to dry. A little known fact about wool is that it gives off heat when it is wet, and don't forget that George Mallory almost climbed Everest in a woollen jumper.



## Outer Layer

The purpose of the outer layer is to keep wind and rain out while at the same time allowing sweat from inside the waterproof to evaporate. This is highly technical and there are many different types of fabric and methods used. Look for fabrics that are breathable but don't neglect other features. A good hood design that turns with your head means you are more likely to put your hood up. Hood down and there is a gaping hole in the top of your jacket. Pockets can only be used if your rucksack hip belt doesn't cover them and so on. Seek good advice with your waterproofs and buy the best you can afford. Remember to be dry your waterproof needs to work.



## Guidelines for waterproofs

You must have a waterproof jacket and waterproof trousers for the expedition. If you turn up without these items you will be unable to take part.



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## What to avoid

Certain clothes should be avoided as they are not really suitable for your expedition

- \* *Jeans* and other items made of denim—denim is heavy, soaks up water, is slow to dry and not wind proof when wet so you get chilled quickly. It also does not pack up easily in your pack.
- \* *Cotton t-shirts*—cotton, like denim, soaks up water and does not dry easily when wet so again you feel chilled. Once wet cotton does not breath so you just get wetter and colder.
- \* *Ski jackets*—these tend not to be that waterproof as they are designed to shed snow not cope with torrential downpours. Because of their insulation they can be too hot to walk in and bulky to pack into your rucksack. Once soaked they are slow to dry.
- \* *Waxed jackets*—for the same reason as ski jackets only more so.
- \* *Ponchos*—the design means that they are not fully waterproof. They are not as versatile as a jacket (they don't have arms for example).
- \* *Lightweight showerproofs*—will not be fully waterproof and so are not acceptable. The fabrics are designed for light showers, not backpacking in possible severe weather.



## Waterproof Trousers

Make sure that the waterproof trousers that you bring on the expedition fit you properly. You should try them on over the trousers you intend to wear on the expedition. You will not want them too tight. Long zips enable you to put them on and take them off without removing your boots. This is really useful, but try it in the shop to make sure the zips are long enough and practice doing it standing up. A way of fastening the trousers at the ankle is useful to stop them flapping around in the wind. Finally, make sure that the legs are not too long. If the trousers drag on the ground or come too far over your boots they will rip very quickly.

## Trousers

The trousers you wear on expedition only need to have 3 properties. They need to be quick drying if they get wet, warm enough for the conditions and comfortable to walk in. That usually means that they are a loose fit. You can buy a pair of trekking trousers with lots of pockets, a technical fabric and maybe zip off legs to turn into shorts. Alternatively, why not wear a pair of tracksuit trousers. As long as they meet the above criteria, you do not need to spend a fortune. On no account should you wear jeans or other types of denim, however. If you choose to bring shorts or 3/4 length trousers, you must ensure that you have full leg cover in your rucksack.



## Care of your clothes

Unfortunately, the clothes you wear on your expedition will not wash themselves. If you leave them on the floor they will not make it into the washing machine like the rest of your clothes. Trust me, your Mum will not touch them! Modern fabrics require special care when washing them. Always follow the manufacturers instructions and avoid using biological washing powders. These can destroy the coatings and treatments that are applied to your clothes to help them breath and keep



them waterproof.

*Waterproofs*—Keeping your waterproofs clean will prolong their life, help them to breath and keep them waterproof. When washing your waterproofs, buy a specialist cleaner and make sure you reproof your jacket and trousers. Reproofing ensures that water beads on the surface rather than soaking in. This helps the fabric to breath. Waterproofs usually require to be tumble dried to reactivate the coatings applied to them, but check the instructions and watch the temperature settings.

## Softshell

Not an eighties pop duo! Softshell is a term used to describe a very wide variety of clothing. A softshell fabric is one that is more breathable than a waterproof fabric, but in order to achieve this is not waterproof although they can be described as weatherproof. Different manufacturers use many different fabrics with different properties. Some insulate as well as keeping the wind and showers out, others just provide a wind and showerproof layer. A softshell can be a good option in changeable conditions particularly when you are very active. The downside is that they can be very expensive and you still need a waterproof.