

5: Fleece

You can buy fleeces which are essentially 'fashion' items for use as normal day-to-day wear rather than garments worn for extended periods outside. These are not the subject of this guide.

This guide is about fleeces designed to deliver at least basic performance in breathability, insulation and wind protection.

Technical fleeces such as these are often used as part of a three layer system. In this, your fleece is the second layer (aka mid-layer or performance layer.) It is a continuation of the base layer in managing moisture, but should also provide thermal insulation.

Key considerations are:

① Material

Synthetic fleeces are available from a range of manufacturers with a variety of brand names (eg Capilene, Synchronilla, Polartec).

Whilst generally similar, they do vary slightly on a number of fronts: water retention, how they feel and the degree of wind blocking achieved. So you need to decide what it is you're looking for in a fleece before making your choice.

It is difficult to actually test the performance of a fleece in the shop before buying, however it's worthwhile checking the manufacturer's claims:-

Is the wind blocking effect intended to allow you to wear the fleece without an outer garment in mild conditions?

If you plan to use the fleece in very cold conditions, is the level of insulation high enough?

For overall comfort, does the manufacturer state that the fabric is breathable and will wick moisture away?

② Fit

A snug fit - maintained if you need to reach high above your head - is essential. Adjustable, elastic hems and cuffs are also useful. Ideally, cords used for adjustment should not hang loosely.

③ Collar

This should fasten snugly and be high enough to protect the neck from cold.

④ Pockets

You should expect to have at least two at hand height on the front of the garment. Check that you can access pockets when your daypack/rucksack belt is fastened.

⑤ Zips

Zips should be tagged so that you can use them whilst wearing gloves.

⑥ Other considerations

If you plan to use the fleece with an outer jacket which has underarm zips, then it's useful if your fleece has underarm zips as well.

The life of your fleece can be extended if areas of high wear (eg shoulders, forearms) are reinforced.

This is particularly useful if you plan to carry a heavy backpack on a regular basis.

