

Parka Selection

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by Ron Blackwood

Parkas constitute one of the most basic survival elements for the outdoor recreationalist. It bears the brunt of the weather and wear, keeping you warm, dry and safe from hypothermia.

A good fit is crucial to the parka's ability to protect you from the elements. If the fit is too tight, you will compress the fill and lose the insulating benefits. If it is too loose, the heat loss will be very rapid, again losing the insulating qualities you seek. A good fit means that proper wind seals occur at the neck, sleeves and waist. The sleeves should extend over the wrist to trap the warmth. Pay close attention to the way a parka fits around the neck. Windy drafts can reach the bare neck and chill you quickly. Neck features to check for are an internal knit storm collar, tunnel collar that seals the neck area, or the various hoods that attach below the collar with a drawcord that pulls close around the face without inhibiting your view.

Look for a durable external shell with a closely woven fabric of nylon/polyester/cotton. This will resist snags and protect you against the wind. This should be followed by an internal lamination of Gore-Tex. This is a lightweight, yet breathable waterproofing layer. Some shells are waterproofed with a plastic coating on the inside of the fabric. These are not breathable. These will keep you dry, but they tend to make you perspire and that can conspire to chill you. Next comes the insulating layer. As with sleeping bags, there are two types of basic insulation. Down is a natural fiber with excellent insulating qualities. Unfortunately, it loses most of its insulating qualities if it gets wet. Synthetics insulate as well as down but will retain approximately 85% of their insulating ability when

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wet. The most popular synthetics today are Thinsulate and Quallofil. There should be an internal liner of either nylon or cotton.

I like lots of pockets.... just make sure that you can get into them easily with gloves or mittens on. I particularly prefer cargo pockets with handwarmer pockets behind them. I also like insulated hoods with good easy-to-operate drawstrings.