

Rab Latok Alpine Jacket and Westcomb Specter LT Hoody

Unparalleled breathability and clean, lightweight designs distinguish the year's top shells.

Usually, we ding waterproof/breathable shells that lack pit zips. Without the extra ventilation, we simply get too steamy while hiking hard in the rain. But neither the Rab Latok Alpine nor the Westcomb Specter LT Hoody have pit zips, and we didn't miss them. Both shells are made with eVent fabric, which testers found amazingly breathable on wet-weather trips from Glacier to Rainier, the Tetons to the Sawtooths, New England to the Scottish Highlands. We wore these full-zip jackets through snow squalls, cold wind, and downpours, and no matter the elements we always stayed dry. Even in the most challenging conditions—hiking uphill with jackets fully zipped to the chin—the fabric moved moisture so well that we felt merely damp on the inside, then dried out within minutes after our exertion decreased.

We found the lighter Westcomb best for milder (three-season) weather, while the slightly burlier Rab crosses over from summer to moderate winter conditions. That said, the two shells share a number of design features and a distinctively unfussy elegance. Both have an athletic fit that allows full range of motion, and a below-the-hip cut that protects from blowing rain and doesn't ride up under a pack. Both hoods are brimmed and adjustable, and they're protective without being obstructive. And both jackets have simple, minimalist pocket configurations: The Westcomb has one outer Napoleon and two inner pockets, while the Rab has a bit more storage capacity with two outer chest and two inner pockets.

Rab Latok Alpine Jacket: \$275; men's S-XXL, women's 8-16; 1 lb.; (800) 895-9581 (note: this is a U.K. number, so time changes apply); rab.uk.com. Reader service #108

Westcomb Specter LT Hoody: \$299; men's S-XXL, women's XS-XL; 12 oz.; (604) 420-8964; westcomb.com. Reader service #109. Both weights are for men's medium.

Rab and Westcomb products are not yet widely available at U.S. retail stores. Check online retailers such as backcountry.com and prolightgear.com.

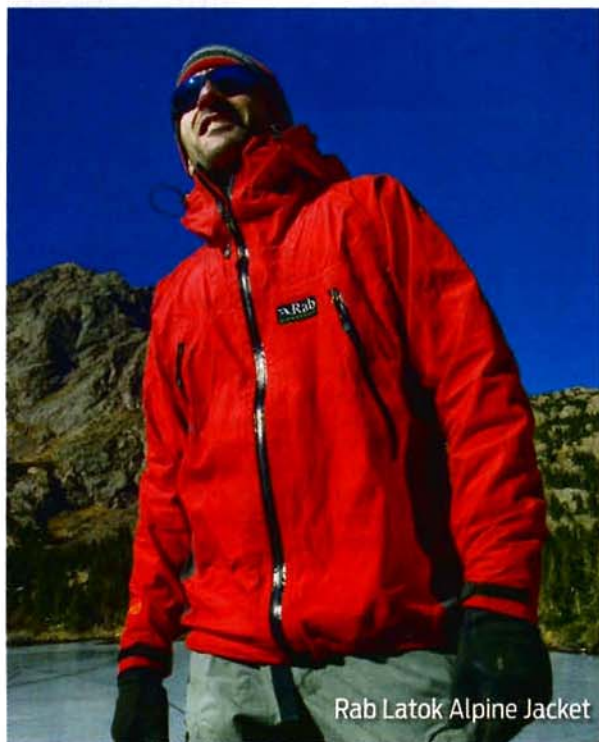


Westcomb Specter LT Hoody

Scarpa Kailash GTX

This all-purpose midweight hits the hiking boot trifecta—great fit, support, and price.

Once in while, we test a piece of gear that looks much like other products crowding the shelves—yet is anything but average. This midcut boot is one of those standouts. It starts with impeccable out-of-the-box fit. The heel cup cradles the rear foot so securely that, without exception, testers reported no slipping or hot spots. The toe box is adequately roomy for the normal swelling that occurs on long days with a heavy pack; the durable suede uppers soften up faster than full-grain leather; and the nicely padded tongue never slips out of place. From Idaho's Sawtooth Mountains to the Colorado Rockies, we found it supportive enough for trail hiking with a 50-pound pack—thanks to ample torsional stiffness and an above-the-ankle cut—yet lean enough for dayhikes. Good forefoot flex gives the boot a "light, quick" feel, editors said. A Gore-Tex membrane keeps feet dry, and it breathes well enough that testers' socks only got slightly clammy even after hard hiking in temperatures well into the 80s. The lacing system features metal eyelets at the forefoot that help the laces move smoothly and fabric loops at the midfoot that locks them down, so you can adjust the forefoot and ankle independently to micro-tune fit. The Vibram soles held firm on every surface we encountered, and we bashed the reinforced toe and heel through talus and scree without seeing significant wear. Best for medium-volume, medium-width feet. \$169; 2 lbs. 12 oz. (men's 42); half sizes in men's Euro 38-48, women's 36-43; (866) 998-2895; scarpa.com. Reader service #110



Rab Latok Alpine Jacket

