

## TRIED AND TESTED

# Insulated jackets

Wild's lads and ladies try a selection of down and synthetic puffer jackets on for size



### 1. Mountain Designs Pro Elite Aurora 11 Sweater | \$400 | [mountaindesigns.com](http://mountaindesigns.com)

From the chunky two-way zip with glove-friendly toggle to the fully tricot-lined pockets, this jacket means business; Himalayan-level business. The 800-loft goose down fill (280g, only 10% feather), plus a generous synthetic-fill draught tube under the main zip, made me feel like I was wearing half a sleeping bag, making it best suited to Tasmanian tops or international peak-bagging trips. Though rain didn't bead the same way as on shinier models, it took longer for a downpour to soak through the Gore-Tex Windstopper Active outer to the filling and make the jacket feel heavy and cool. With two mesh drop pockets for warming up your camera or water bottle and a generous chest pocket, this hoodless model also compresses (with some aggressive wrestling) into its own pocket despite weighing around 980g. Sweating was an issue in the Victorian high country so the two-way zip came in handy for venting, but for a classic, big-mountain jacket for the depths of winter this is hard to beat (and I recently saw it on sale).

### 2. Lowe Alpine Women's Lhasa | \$269 | [intertrek.com.au](http://intertrek.com.au)

This 650-loft duck down jacket with textured nylon shell and popped hood was one of the most versatile tested in terms of its rain resistance, low-profile fit and average warmth-to-weight ratio. At around 490g, true to size and with a drawcorded drop-tail hem, this warmed me quickly and stayed hugging my hips under an overnight pack. Lowe Alpine's hydrophobic finish is said to slow

the uptake of water to around half the usual rate of down, and heavy rain did seem to take longer to permeate the sewn-through chambers than on the Bonney and Reactor. The puffy hood is easy to customise with multiple drawcords and wire, but could do with coming a little lower down the forehead. I appreciated the collar's tricot lining, which continues under your chin, and the seams look like they would hold up under stress. I do worry about the lining being so thin as to show the feathers though. I would have appreciated some venting under the arm as it reaches right into your pits, while there's just a flap under the zip where others tested have a draught tube. The single internal pocket is big enough for a phone or muesli bar, but otherwise we're talking minimalistic design. The lycra inner cuffs stretched over time a bit too far down my hand, and then got wet and muddy in camp, but the thin Velcro-fastened outer cuff blocked out the wind best of all the women's jackets. This packs down to about the same size as the Reactor, while the higher (20%) proportion of feather in the filling suggests it might flatten more over time.

### 3. Gondwana Men's Gairdner Eco Down | \$170 | [gondwanaoutdoor.com.au](http://gondwanaoutdoor.com.au)

At just over six feet tall, I found the Large model a tad short, and confess the neon orange lining was a bit of a turn-off (though the coloured zip pulls are a nice touch). This is much less puffy than the Virtuoso and Aurora, owing to its recycled polyester microfibre fill, so it's a shame the cuffs aren't more wind-blocking. The chest pocket is a bit too high for my liking but the drawcord hem

is quick to operate. I would have liked more stretch at the underarms and shoulders but couldn't fault the nylon outer for the price. The outside pockets aren't lined but there's a useful inside zip pocket for things like coins or passport. The main zip is two-way but not especially water- or wind-proof, and the lining was not as soft on the skin as in the Virtuoso. Handy for travelling if you'd rather steer clear of water-hating down and not too warm for the east coast.

### 4. Mountain Designs Women's Reactor 14 | \$200 | [mountaindesigns.com](http://mountaindesigns.com)

This midweight (150g of 600-loft duck down, 10% feather) jacket with polyester shell feels a bit thicker than the Bonney but features a synthetic-insulated draught tube behind the main zip for extra protection. The zips are the hidden-teeth type rather than the waterproof-tape type but the pocket ones are protected from the rain by mini storm flaps. It took a while to get used to the two-way zip (to not feel like I was going to break it) but I loved the contrasting-colour rubber zip pulls, and the slightly chunkier drawcord toggles than found on the Lhasa were easy to adjust on the move. I fear the tiny bit of Velcro on the non-elasticated cuffs would fail sooner rather than later, but the internal stuff pocket is a big plus. A tad more boxy in shape than others tested, and a bit tighter round the chin, I nevertheless fit a rain layer over the top and the hem is a good length. The on-trend colour might be considered a bonus, and I was impressed how well the matte outer glided through prickly scrub. For dry, windy days in the Victorian alps, this is a toasty option.





#### 5. Gondwana Women's Bonney | \$180 [gondwanaoutdoor.com.au](http://gondwanaoutdoor.com.au)

This urban-style parka complete with popped faux fur-trimmed hood is not for everyone, but its promise of 100% recycled synthetic fill caught my attention. Though the flattish foam-like filling was not as warm, nor compressible, as I hoped for its 790g, the jacket's nylon outer did block the wind effectively on the Great Ocean Walk. The basic construction, including some fraying and exposed bobbin thread on the outside, meant I could feel cold spots soon after we stopped moving however. The handwarmer pockets are nice and deep but could do with some fleece, and I worry about the durability of the elastic strips that stand in for cuffs. While the Reactor is a far superior active jacket for the price, this is an attractive and responsible choice if you prefer a long cut for walks close to home. Birdwatchers might not like the rustling though.

#### 6. Kathmandu Women's XT DriFill | \$700 [kathmandu.com.au](http://kathmandu.com.au)

This all-singing all-dancing 750-loft goose down jacket incorporating Pertex Shield waterproofing and NGX<sup>2</sup>-laminated shell is longer fitting and box-baffled for those looking to shred pow in Japan or hang around high-altitude basecamps. The much-vaunted DriFill did retain its puffiness and thus warmth better than the other women's jackets tested, but not quite enough to rule out factors such as the differences between duck/goose and fill weights in general. Unsurprisingly for a weight of just under a kilogram, you're

wearing a fair amount of features (big zip loops, chunky toggles, two Napoleon pockets, down-filled inner collar, wide storm flaps etc), which are all handy if you're riding chairlifts or bunkering down but not so fun when snagging on vegetation or counting grams. The stuff sack is twice as big as the Reactor's, making for a decent pillow if it was fleecy, while the slanted cuffs provide extra protection when not wearing gloves. The fixed, helmet-friendly hood (with nifty little tightening toggles) was one of the warmest tested, and I appreciated the tricot-covered zip garage, but in extreme cold I'd still opt for the puffer, unisex Aurora Sweater.

#### 7. The North Face Men's Thunder Micro | \$380 | [thenorthface.com.au](http://thenorthface.com.au)

I instantly loved the sleek design of this commuter-style matte jacket, but less so the pricetag, until I realised the 800-loft goose down inside the 'micro' baffles incorporates a new Teflon-based water-shedding treatment known as ProDown. In addition to packing easily into its own pocket and weighing only 350g, this ultralight model kept me warmer than I expected when drenched because it did not flatten completely and then dried quickly. It's not nearly as rain- or wind-blocking as the other men's jackets tested (including the shiny, similar-priced Virtuoso), but the warmth-to-weight ratio is still impressive with features like internally elasticated cuffs. The snug fit limited snares on the 20D ripstop nylon outer while scrambling, and everyone

appreciated my being able to spot clean the wicking armpit panels. The vertical baffles on the shoulder, and the drawcord hem being inside the pockets, make for an urban look but I'd have no issues trusting this as a mid-layer in the snowfields.

#### 8. Outdoor Research Men's Virtuoso Hoody | \$389 | [intertrek.com.au](http://intertrek.com.au)

Featuring a shell that's 20D nylon on the body and 30D nylon with an air-permeable DWR on the sleeves and shoulders, this is a lightweight but versatile jacket. It offers good mobility through the shoulders and hips (with a two-way zip), and compacts very small into its own tricot-lined pocket for use as a pillow. The shiny outer sheds drizzle and light snow well, while the taffeta lining feels a bit sturdier than others tested. I appreciated the inside drop pocket and rated this the second warmest men's jacket tested. The 650-loft goose down fill (20% feather, 240g) was plenty warm over a thin base layer in June in the high country, and the drop-tail hem provided good protection from the cold air. The fill is distributed wider across the back to avoid overheating under a pack, though sweat did build up here and the back of my neck eventually, while the fairly boxy fit allows for deep handwarmer pockets (enough for a beanie, buff, skins etc). The zip was sticky at first (you have to thread it quite deep) so would be tricky with ski gloves on, but I liked the flattish drawcord toggles. The compressibility means you can afford to carry this as a spare for cold nights and the hood fits over a helmet comfortably.