

Backcountry

The Gear Closet »



Sure, they work fine the first time, but how about a few seasons later?



The Best of the Test

Gear in the long term: what happens after the reviews are written

Most of the gear that I review gets returned to the manufacturers or given away to testers. On the rare day when something that we're testing strikes me as being of unusual interest, I ask to hang onto the piece for long-term testing. This gives me the opportunity to put the item to more rigorous testing and through the different seasons. The products I'll talk about in this issue have traveled all over the Northwest in backcountry and car-camping applications, daylong backcountry ski trips, and long week-ends fly fishing in the Inland Empire.

MSR Hubba Hubba

When the Hubba Hubba made its debut in the mid-2000s, it was regarded as a feat of engineering. This was one of the first two-man, three-season, freestanding tents to weigh in at right about 4 pounds. Everything about this tent was perfect—except for the fact that it only had one door, requiring one person to climb

over the other to exit the tent. Not surprisingly, the Hubba Hubba had two doors the very next season, and what you see today is basically unchanged. I bought this tent, as I didn't want to ponder ever having to return it. Mine has been through sandstorms in Idaho and rainstorms in Washington and is still working as well as the day I got it. The Hubba Hubba is not 100% sandproof, but I'm not sure any three Season tent would fare better. In rainstorms, it's been incomparable for a tent with an almost entirely mesh body. The only improvement I've made is to swap out the needle stakes for MSR's Groundhog stakes, improving stability.

Petzl e+LITE

This tiny headlamp was the darling of the Outdoor Retailer show when it debuted in 2006. There's always a must-have item at the show, and this was it. I don't think I ever reviewed it, but this little powerhouse has been in my pack



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ever since I got it. Weighing in at just 1 ounce, the e+LITE boasts multiple settings, including flashing options and a red LED for preserving night vision. There's a tiny whistle attached to the headband and a clever pivoting ball joint so the light can be set at any angle. It's the perfect little light to carry as a backup light for those "just in case" situations. A ten-year guarantee and a water-resistant housing simply add to the value.



Jetboil Helios

Jetboil's Helios, or as I like to think of it, their "cooking" stove (versus the PCS, their "super fast water-boiling" stove) joined me on a road trip in 2008 and immediately became my favorite stove. It takes the amazing power of the Jetboil heat exchanger and couples it with a more traditional cookpot shape to make this setup tough to beat. The Helios has completely replaced a Coleman two-burner stove—it can do everything the larger stove can do, only better. This system is great for backcountry trips with three or more people. The external canister allows for consumption of every last molecule of fuel, and the flame can be fine-tuned by tipping the canister. The stove's clever design has a very sturdy base, and pot grippers plus the heat exchanger make spills highly unlikely. Another benefit of the remote canister setup is that it allows for the use of a windscreen, and the one on the Helios works very well.



Bridgedale Ventum Socks

I'm excited about socks. Yes, socks, I know, right? Have you ever had a sock bunch up when you

were hiking, resulting in a blister the size of Cowlitz County? Of course you have, and you never have to again. Bridgedale Ventum socks come in left and right, so they are actually shaped like feet. There's no extra fabric to cause blisters. As if that's not enough, they are made with a yarn that's actually a wool strand wrapped in a synthetic strand. You get the best of both—the antimicrobial properties of the wool, also known as "no stink," and the wicking and precise fit best associated with synthetics.



REI Taku Jacket

I was pretty excited when REI debuted the Taku jacket a few seasons ago. It brought a hybrid soft-shell/hard-shell hybrid jacket to the masses with award-winning style and an affordable price. I've used our test Taku in every imaginable condition, from driving rain and torrential wind to classic Cascade Concrete snow. It's NEVER wetted out or otherwise misbehaved. The front pockets work as chest vents to lower core temperature, and the stretch of the body of the jacket provides mobility when it's needed for skiing or fly fishing. The low-profile seams and pockets work well under a pack. My one minor issue is with the cut of the sleeve cuffs, and this has been addressed in the current design. ♦

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