

Base Layers



By Susan Schnier

No matter how technical your outerwear, nothing is more important on a long, sweaty backcountry tour than a comfortable, effective base layer. Even if you have the latest breathable, water-resistant soft shell, your perspiration will not be magically wicked away unless your base layer is willing to cooperate. And when that afternoon storm rolls in and you're standing atop a windy ridge, resting up for the descent, the last thing you can afford is a wet, cold, next-to-skin layer. So, good breathability and moisture transfer are the most important factors when choosing a good base layer.

Comfort is another important consideration. Obviously, this mostly depends on personal preference—do you like the feel of wool, spandex, or polyester? How sensitive are you to seams, zippers, and collars? Do you prefer a zip-up or pull over base layer? And are you looking for greater warmth or greater breathability?

Though we do not attempt to answer these personal questions in

this base layer review, we do present our findings in each of these categories for each product tested, so you can make your own decision.

Because of technological advances, base layers are no longer inexpensive. At the store recently, I was surprised to find \$50-plus price tags, per piece, hanging on base layers. But, when you think about it, they have come a long way since the days of the waffled, cotton long underwear, and the improvements are certainly worth shelling out the extra cash. But you want to be sure you're choosing the correct one before you take the plunge.

Our test team consisted of five men and three women, taking out these garments in conditions ranging from the warmest of spring days to the coldest of blizzards. And we made sure that they each saw enough wear that the manufacturers were begging us not to send them back.



ARC'TERYX HARDFACE PANT

\$135, 12-13 oz., Men's Sizes: S-XL, Women's Sizes S-L

A soft, cozy pant that will keep you warm in the coldest conditions. The Hardface uses Polartec WindPro, providing an extra-fuzzy, next-to-skin feel, with a more rigid outlayer that blocks wind. Though best suited for conditions where staying warm is more important than having a high level of breathability, the Hardface does breathe well during high activity. The pants are so comfortable that some of our testers didn't want to take them off when the day was done and kept them on for lounging

around the hut.

www.arcteryx.com • 800.985.6681



CRAFT S3 LONG UNDERPANTS S3 CREW LONG SLEEVE

Probably the most unique base layer system in our test, the S3 Pant and Crew incorporate a wind-resistant layer on the front so you can scale down on the shell you would normally wear. Primarily designed for high-activity level sports like road biking and Nordic skiing, the Pants and Crew can easily be worn with only a light shell or soft shell. Made with 100% polyester, they do not absorb moisture and they breathe well. The base layers have a high level of elasticity for great range of motion, but since they do not have much structure, they tended to bunch up and get a little baggy if the fit was not perfect. The material at the waist and cuffs is the same as the rest of the pant (except for the windproof layer), so while it is soft and comfortable, it does not offer snug seals.

www.craft-usa.com • 781.631.9544



CLOUDVEIL WOMEN'S WINTER TEEWINOT TOP

\$55, 6 oz., Sizes: XS-L

As lightweight and smooth as some of the silkweight layers we tested, the Teewinot top is made from Polartec Powderdry for excellent ventilation and ample warmth with an insulating layer. For warmer days, the Teewinot can be worn alone and is rated UPF-20 for sun protection. The top has a mock turtleneck and a zipper for ventilation. The fabric is soft and not abrasive next to skin. A simple and functional top that easily transitions from warm to cold conditions.

www.cloudveil.com • 888.763.5969



DEVOLD POLO W/ZIP LONG JOHNS

\$62, 9 oz., Unisex Sizes: XS-XXL

Utilizing a two-layer construction, the Polo has a wicking inner layer and an insulating outer layer to keep wearers warm and dry. The inner layer is made from Dupont Thermostat, and the outer layer is made from 80% wool and 20% polyester. The result is an extremely warm and soft next-to-skin top. The top is cut longer in the back so it maintains coverage when you're hiking up as well as coming down. The turtleneck ensures that no cold air enters, adding an additional element of warmth to this already toasty layer.

www.devold.no • firmapost@devold.no





DUOFOLD

VARITHERM MIDWEIGHT LONG SLEEVE CREW & BOTTOM

Top: \$20, 5.5 oz., Bottom: \$20, 5.5 oz., Men's Sizes S-2XL and Women's Sizes S-XL

Forty years ago Duofold became a pioneer in synthetic, high-performance base layers. This year, when we tried out some of their newest products, one tester remarked, "The granddad of base layers shows he's still got it!" The Crew and Bottom fit a wide range of body sizes and types well, with great next to skin comfort. They had few seams, helping to increase comfort. Made from 88% polyester and 12% Elastane-Lycra, many felt that the

Crew and Bottom held the perfect balance between stretch and structure, providing warmth as well as freedom of movement. Though they kept us warm on the colder days, breathability and drytime were good in warm weather and/or high activity. An excellent value for all-around use.

www.duofold.com • 800.448.8240



EMS

TECHWICK THERMO ZIP MOCK WOMEN'S TOP TECHWICK X-TRAINING PANTS

Mens: \$35-\$45, 8-9 oz., Womens and Men's Top Sizes: XS-XL Women's Pant Sizes: S-XXL

Thick and plush, EMS' Techwick technology created some of the warmest base layers in the test. The top is longer in back so it provides full coverage during activity. The mock-turtleneck adds an additional element of warmth, with a zip-down option for extra ventilation in warmer conditions. The inner fabric felt warm and soft against our skin and wicked moisture away as quickly as it appeared. The pants have a traditional, rigid elastic closure at the waist and the cuffs are not very tapered, contributing to a looser, "boot-cut" type of fit. Women might want to go a size smaller than usual for a snug fit. A great choice for all activity levels and very cold conditions.

www.ems.com • 888.463.6367



GOLITE

C-THRU LONG SLEEVE COLLARED

\$59, 4 oz., Sizes: S-L

All of GoLite's product line represents its mission to "lighten the loads of people outdoors." From tents to packs to base layers, the company makes featherweight, yet fully functional gear. Not quite see-through, GoLite's C-Thru base layer does use material sparingly for a ghostly-light feel and excellent breathability during high activity. Any sweat that does accumulate is quickly wicked away, keeping you dry in almost all conditions. Flat seams are also placed sparingly for less bulk. A tiny zipper allows additional ventilation of the chest and neck if necessary. The fit is simple and a bit loose for the ultimate featherweight feel. The only issue our testers had with the C-Thru was its lack of durability. The material tended to snag and come undone when it encountered a rough surface or after extended use.

www.golite.com • 888.546.5483



in the

HELLY HANSEN

Backcountry Adventure Gear



Beacons

- 100095 BCA Tracker DTS \$299.00
- 140134 BCA Cmpn Tour System . . . \$79.95
- 140127 Ortovox X1 Transceiver . \$279.95

Shovels

- 100149 BCA Companion \$79.95
- 100500 Voile Tele Extreme \$48.00
- 110115 Life-Link Lexan 3DX \$39.95

Probe Poles

- 140124 BD Adjustable Probe . . . \$89.95
- 5A1002 Life-Link Variant Probe . . \$79.95
- 5A1001 Life-Link Variant Carbon \$139.95

Probes

- 100533 Life-Link 265cm Sectional \$66.95
- 100533 Life-Link 280cm Carbon . . \$79.95
- 100139 Ortovox 240cm Lite \$45.00
- 140126 BD 230cm Carbon Fiber . . \$75.00

Packs & Accessories

- 800026 BD Avalung 2 \$99.95
- 100160 BCA Stash Pack \$145.00
- 950398 Panoptx Cyclone Glasses \$135.00

Ascension Climbing Skins

- 140108 Clip Fix 55 - 120mm . . from \$102.50
- 140109 Standard 50 - 120mm . . from \$87.50

- 800024 Avalung regular \$199 **SALE \$49.98***

*Avalung is FREE with purchase of any current season tele or AT package.)



Please use key code: 11105

MOUNTAIN GEAR

www.mountaingear.com

1-800-829-2009



LIFA PROWOOL PANT & STRIPED CREW

\$45, Women's Sizes: XS-XL, Men's Sizes XS-XXL

The Lifa Prowool Pant and Crew combine the warmth of wool (about 43%) with the excellent moisture-moving properties of polypropylene (about 47%), and the water-resistance of nylon (about 10%). The result is a soft against the skin, highly insulating base layer that doesn't absorb moisture, breathes well and has great elasticity so as not to restrict movement. Wearing and touching these base layers, our testers had no idea that they were made with wool—only their good insulation in cold conditions gave that away. Elastic on the waistband, collar, and cuffs is coated with a soft outer material so it doesn't irritate the skin.

www.hellyhansen.com • 800.435.5901



www.ibex-wear.com • 800.773.9647

ICEBREAKER LONG SLEEVE CREW & LEGGINGS

\$85 NZ, Sizes: S-XXL

Made from 100% New Zealand Merino wool, this was one of the thicker and warmer wool base layers tested. The simple lines and seams made for a comfortable, flexible fit and the dropped back provided full coverage for trekking up the hill and riding down. The wool material wicked away sweat easily and helped regulate body temperature for variable levels of activity. Our testers found the Crew and Leggings kept them warm and cozy in the coldest of conditions.

and wettest

www.icebreaker.co.nz • info@icebreaker.co.nz



IBEX

RIGLO L/S T

\$65, 7 oz., Men's Sizes: S-XL, Women's Sizes: S-L

Since Ibx is the wool company, it comes as no surprise that the Riglo is made with 100% Merino wool. Despite some misconceptions, wool is not inherently itchy; the finer the fibers, the smoother the feel. So the Riglo, made from 18.5 micron Merino wool, is actually a very comfortable base layer. It stays warm when it gets wet for great temperature regulation and it does not retain odor. However, since wool will absorb some water, a few testers did find it clingy once it got damp. The Riglo is a relatively loose-fitting base layer, without too much structure and it resembles a regular, outerwear shirt. A good choice for cold weather.



ISIS

SPLIT P LONG JANE, LONG SLEEVE V-NECK

\$50, 5 oz., Sizes: XS-L

True high-activity base layers, the silkweight Split P and V-Neck are made from 89% polyester and 11% Lycra for a silky, smooth, lightweight feel. Because the fabric is so light and stretchy, it conforms to your body for a great fit and total freedom of movement. It's so light, you'll hardly notice it's there. If you prefer a more insulating base layer, the Split P and V-Neck are not for you. But, if you like a silkweight feel and tend to overheat, they're an excellent choice. Fabric covers the elastic waistband for added comfort and the V-Neck has stylish, tapered flat seams for added comfort. If you're a woman and you haven't tried the Split P system, it is



"ZACK OF O3" REPEAT TOUR

Alpine Meadows, California:

- January 9 USTSA Telemark Slopestyle Championships
- January 10-12 Dura Mater/Alpine Meadows Telemark Championships

Jackson Hole, Wyoming:

- February 4-6 Black Diamond Steep Skiing Camp
- February 7-9 Freeskiing Comp

Crested Butte, Colorado:

- February 27 USTSA Slopestyle Championships
- February 28 - Freeskiing Comp
- March 2
- March 1 Black Diamond Steep Skiing Camp with Leslie Ross

Snowbasin, Utah:

- March 28-30 8th Annual World Telemark Freeskiing Championships
- March 29 Black Diamond Steep Skiing Camp with Leslie Ross

For more information
visit www.ustsa.org

Couloir

snowbasin

boeri

Black Diamond

CRESTED BUTTE

Alpine Meadows

VonK

telemark



UNITED STATES

DURA MÄTER

TELEMARK

FREESKIING SERIES

2003

time to give it a shot. The system, which allows you to pee without pulling down your pants and freezing your butt off, only works with overpants that have a zippered crotch. Together, they put women and men, and their calls of nature, back on the same backcountry playing field.

www.isisforwomen.com • 802.862.3351



MARMOT

SILKWEIGHT LS CREW

\$37, 4-5 oz., Men's and Women's Sizes: S-XXL

The LS Crew is a lightweight base layer that combines the wicking properties and freedom of movement of silk with a little bit more structure for a form-fit. The fabric is Marmot's DriClima Silkweight, a polyester blend designed to wick moisture away during high-levels of activity. The LS Crew did a great job of keeping our testers dry without binding or clinging to the skin. Tightly sewn seams were not irritating to our sensitive-skinned testers. Manufacturer information is printed onto the Crew, not on a tag, for a simple, more comfortable design. The minimalist design and fit of the Crew, combined with its good wicking and quick drying made this garment a top pick for lightweight base layers among our testers.

www.marmot.com • 707.544.4590



MILLET

MOUNTAIN ZIP ML

\$69, 10 oz., Men's sizes: M-XL

Made with Polartec Powerdry, the Mountain Zip ML has a two-layer construction. The suede-like inner surface makes it comfortable against the skin, with a jersey-style outer layer for enhanced breathability and style. The collar is mock-turtleneck with zip-down ventilation. Flat seams on the inside and outside of the Zip ML provide extra comfort against the skin. The fit is loose, comfortable, and fashionable, with excellent wicking and drytime. Not a particularly insulating base layer, the Zip ML is great for high activity or those who like a lighter base layer. Our testers loved this base layer for staying dry during endurance activities. The only drawback is that the Zip ML shrunk a bit over time.

www.millet.fr • 800.514.4807



MOONSTONE

LOGAN ZIP-T

\$100, 8 oz., Women's Sizes: S-L

Moonstone uses Polartec PowerStretch to achieve a balance between stretchy comfort and warmth. While the stretch is exceptional, the inside of the Zip-T is fleecy and cozy next to skin. The zip-up neck, sheen, and stylish cut make it fashionable enough to be worn as outerwear. Underarm gussets help increase already good mobility. Breathability is good, but because of the material, the Zip-T really excels in colder or less active conditions. Inside seams are flat so as not to irritate the skin. Warm, durable, and comfortable, the Logan Zip-T could easily be your single, all-conditions base layer.

www.moonstone.com • 800.390.3312



MOUNTAIN HARDWARE

eXTEND TIGHT AND eXTEND ZIP-T

Tight: \$48, 7 oz., Zip-T: \$60, 8 oz. Men's sizes: S-XXL, Women's sizes: XS-L

The eXtend Tight and Zip-T are made with 100% polyester Polartec Powerdry with a permanent odor-reducing, anti-microbial treatment called Extatic. The feel against the skin is similar to a traditional base layer, in that it resembles cotton more than Lycra or wool, and it moves comfortably with you, rather than bunching or clinging to your skin. They are mid-weight pieces good for activity in a wide range of temperatures. Wicking and dry time were excellent in the Tight and the Zip-T, and our testers enjoyed the anatomical fit and no-rub zones created by well-placed seams. The ankle and wrist areas are made with Lycra for a tight seal so they stay in place and don't interfere with boot-entry or cuff closure. The waistband on the

Tight is made with elastic that can be slightly abrasive to sensitive skin, but when combined with a tucked-in Zip-T, it was not a problem. The Tight and Zip-T did not come with tags at the waist or neck, a thoughtful feature for our sensitive-skinned testers. Overall, this combination is a great choice for a highly-versatile, base layer system.

www.mountainhardware.com • 800.953.8375



AND ON SALE!

regular **SALE**

Skis

221111 K2 Totally Piste (2002)	\$459.00	\$.249.98
221110 K2 Piste Stinx (2001)	\$399.00	\$.229.98
221137 Karhu Draco (2001)	\$279.95	\$.149.98

Clothing

122050 Patagonia Stretch Boundary Jkt.....	\$279.00	\$.189.98
122051 Patagonia Stretch Boundary Pant.	\$239.00	\$.169.98
<i>Buy jacket & pants for \$339. Save \$179!</i>		
372507 BD Thermostat Glove	\$59.50	\$.39.98
372502 BD Guide Glove	\$149.50	\$.99.98

Accessories

100010 Life-Link Knee Pads	\$29.95	\$.22.48
103586 K2 Telemark Ski/Board Bag		



Please use key code: 11105

Visit our **NEW CLEARANCE SECTION**
on our web site!

MOUNTAIN GEAR

www.mountaingear.com

1-800-829-2009

MOVING COMFORT

MICRO LONG JANE & ALL-WEATHER CREW

Long Jane: \$32, 5 oz. All-Weather Crew: \$35, 3.5 oz., Women's Sizes: S-XL.



Made with a lightweight, silky polyester fabric called CoolMax Alta, and 12% Lycra, the Long Jane and All-Weather Crew are extremely soft to the touch. These are a great choice for warm-weather touring, or those who prefer a softer, lighter weight base layer in all conditions. Because of their suppleness and minimalist seams, the Crew and Long Jane do not have a distinct structure so they cling to your body as it moves. The Crew has a low scoopneck, shorter sleeves and a shorter torso. While the feather-weight feel was great for warmer days and higher-activities, some of our testers wanted more coverage for colder conditions. The Crew and Long Jane wicked moisture effectively and dried quickly. The elastic waistband on the Long Jane was soft and smooth for increased comfort and neither piece came with tags on the waist or neck.



Crew and Long Jane wicked moisture effectively and dried quickly. The elastic waistband on the Long Jane was soft and smooth for increased comfort and neither piece came with tags on the waist or neck.

www.movingcomfort.com • 800.763.6000

PATAGONIA

R.5 TOP & R.5 SUPER FLY TIGHTS



Top: \$69, 7 oz., Tights: \$59, 7 oz., Men's Sizes: S-XL Women's Sizes: XS-L

Using 98% Polartec PowerDry and 2% spandex, Patagonia incorporates its Regulator system into these layers, with fibers arranged to wick moisture away quickly. The system gives the garments an inside-out look, with a smooth exterior and a waffled interior. The result is very effective wicking and a cozy next-to-skin feel. The pants have an elastic waistband with tapered cuffs. The women's have a pull-apart crotch, while the men's have a fly and a pull-apart backside. Some of our male testers found the extra material to be a little bulky, but the women liked the streamlined fit.



www.patagonia.com • 800.638.6464

RLX RALPH LAUREN

MOBLIUS FLEECE TOP

\$97.50, 7 oz., Men's Sizes: S-XXL, Women's Sizes: S-XL



As its name implies, the Moblius Fleece Top is an insulating base layer with water-resistant ma-

LIFE-LINK[®]

DYNAFIT

Test your endurance, skill and equipment at the 2003 Life-Link/Dynafit Randonnee Rallies.



Whistler, British Columbia - Jan. 11th

Crested Butte, Colorado - Feb. 16th

Alpentel, Washington - Feb. 23rd
Marmot Randonnee Rally at Alpentel

Stevens, Washington - March 9th

Jackson Hole Mt. Resort - March 22nd
Marmot North American Championship*

Couloir

cloudveil

Marmot Powder

off-Piste

MOUNTAIN HARD WEAR

SUUNTO REPLACING LUCK.

PETZL

Sanctioned by the International Ski Mountaineering Council (ISMC) and the American Alpine Club* Competitors in both race and recreation divisions will compete for over \$10,000 in cash and prizes

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL LIFE-LINK AT 800.443.8620 ext 175/ www.life-link.com

terial making it a great choice for full protection in foul weather. The top is made from Polartec PowerStretch fabric for excellent warmth and freedom of movement. A DWR finish provides water-repellent protection (in case you're wearing it without a shell or with a leaky one). This combination of materials offered additional wind protection for our testers. A zippered collar allows extra ventilation, making the layer more versatile for warmer days. Because of the insulation, breathability wasn't great, but this didn't faze some of our testers, who stayed warm on windy summits despite being a little wet. The fit was comfortable, but the sizes seem to run on the small side. Overall, our testers liked this piece for most conditions, raving about its comfort next to skin and its warmth.

www.polo.com • 866.897.7656

SMARTWOOL

MEN'S AND WOMEN'S AERO LS CREW & TIGHT

\$54.95, TK oz., Men's Crew Sizes: M-XXL, Men's Tight Sizes: S-XXL, Women's Crew and Tight Sizes: XS-L

Warm, comfortable, and quick to dry, the Crew and Tight served our testers well in all conditions, particularly the coldest and wettest ones. "It feels like wearing a big sock," remarked one tester.

The Crew and Tight are made from 100% SmartWool merino wool, providing excellent temperature regulation, but without the itch sometimes associated with wool. Ideal conditions for these base layers are on the colder side of

things. Fit was good, with excellent movement in the knees, waist and shoulder, allowing for a wide range of motion. These base layers tended to stretch out over time and lose their



shape and form fit. But they bounced back and regained their shape after washing. www.smartwool.com • 800.550.WOOL

SNOW ANGEL TOP AND PANTS

Top: \$TK, 6 oz., Pants: \$TK, 6 oz., Women's Sizes: S-L

The softest base layers in the test, the Doeskin Top and Pants lived up to their name. If you're a woman with sensitive skin, do not overlook these base layers. Snow Angel's Doeskin is a cashmere-feeling microfleece fabric, blended with Lycra for good insulation, and freedom of movement without the bulk. Though not very thick, this system was one of the warmer ones tested. The Pants have a unique feature that impressed our testers—the V-waist is made of the same material as the rest of the pant, it is not elastic and therefore will not irritate your skin, bunch up,

or leave a mark at the end of the day. The tapered, low-rise cut created a sleek appearance and high-level of comfort when worn with pants and a pack or harness. The Top has a large scoop neck, a feature that, while stylish, sacrifices some warmth. The breathability of the Doeskin was not exceptional, so it is best for colder days and/or lower-levels of activity. Snow Angel also makes silkweight base layer systems called Cybersilk and Veluxe.

www.snow-angel.com • 650.728.1566



If its in this magazine,
we sell it!

888-625-8444

www.thebackcountry.net



Stash BC Pack
w/Bladder
144.⁹⁹



Alpine
Trekking
179.⁹⁹

Companion Shovel
extendable w/probe
104.⁹⁹



BCA Lowfat Skins
(90mm)
116.⁹⁹



Tracker
DTS
299.⁹⁹



Brad Barlage
Photo by Mike Schwartz