

Clothing System

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On any outdoors outing, you should use a layering system of clothing.

Inner Layer The system that I use starts with an inner layer [sometimes called base layer] of quick drying and good wicking material that lifts moisture away from the body. Polyester and Coolmax are two pretty good materials for this purpose. These are synthetic materials that does the job very well and is very popular right now. Back in the old days, this first base layer of clothing was commonly referred to as "long-johns," made out of cotton. Cotton works fine until it is wet. Cotton has a hard time drying and it makes you colder when it is wet. Within the last decade or so, Capilene, Polypropylene and some other materials were in popular use. However, they retained a terrible odor after it got wet. Today, out of the various fabrics on the market trying to accomplish these quick-drying and good-wicking tasks, I like the performance of Polyester and Coolmax the best.

Insulating Layer The next layer that goes next to base-inner layer is the insulating layer. A good popular material nowadays is Polartec(tm) fleece. Polartec (tm) comes in different weights, with the thinnest being 100 on up to I believe 300. It also has a regular and a recycled material. Personally, I can't tell the difference between the two types of material (ie. regular and recycled). I have noticed that Polartec(tm) is also being used as a base layer material since it is very lightweight and dries fast. Note however, that Polartec(tm) fleece is not windproof. That is why, sometimes it is necessary to have a third layer called the shell layer. But before we get to the shell, there are a couple of other materials worth mentioning. First is the Gore Windstopper(tm). This material cost a bit more than the normal polarfleece. It is an excellent material that is composed of a windproof Gore material sandwiched between two layers of fleece, thereby making it warm and windproof. The North Face was one of the first companies to adapt this material into their clothing line. I think that Gore Windstopper(tm) is starting to get more popular due to the lower price cost now. Wool is also good as an insulating layer. It has the quick-drying capabilities. However, it is heavy and bulky. Before the invent of the polarfleece, the Europeans tend to love wool for some reason. I don't know if they still do or not, but I hate to carry all that extra weight on the trails.

Shell Layer The next and usually the last layer is the shell layer. This layer protects you from the rain, snow, or wind that may attack you when you're outdoor. Most of the time you'll not need this layer. However, under windy and rainy conditions, you'll need it. Some people still like to use the plastic poncho. It does the job alright. However, it tends to get in the way if you want more freedom in movement. The best thing to do is to have a jacket or parka and pants made out of Gore-tex. It is lightweight, compact, breathable, windproof, and waterproof. Thus, you can pack it in the pack with no problems. The cost of Goretex is looking a lot lower than what it use to be (ie. more affordable). If these three layers are still not warm enough, you can add an additional layer of insulation. I refer to this layer as the insulation-2 layer. You can add on a layer of down before the shell. This gives you some more warmth in addition to the polarfleece.

Conclusion: Stay away from cotton as a clothing material, no matter what season you're using it for. Cotton doesn't dry good, it makes you cold, and is heavy and bulky when wet. With a layering system, you're able to take off or put on each layer as needed. You don't have to be stuck wearing everything.