

4-Season Sleeping Bags

For high altitude or winter treks and expeditions, a warm sleeping bag is vital – our test team, headed by **Paul Smith**, try out 10 of the best currently on the market...

WORDS & PICTURES PAUL SMITH

There's nothing worse than shivering all night in your tent when on a trekking or mountaineering trip, and those that have experienced this will agree that investing in a high quality 4-season sleeping bag is money well spent. In the past, the logical choice has generally been for down-filled bags, given their unbeatable weight/warmth ratio and superior compressibility, however synthetic-filled bags are much more affordable and may still be the preferred option if you're heading off to somewhere where you are guaranteed damp or wet (as well as cold) conditions. They won't be as light or compressible as down bags of course, but they will generally lose far less of their warmth when wet, and also dry out much quicker.

Having said that, many down bags now come with hydrophobic (water-hating) down inside, so the traditional advantage of synthetic filling over down is not quite as pronounced as it once was. Although we haven't run specific tests on the effectiveness of the various types of hydrophobic down, our inclination is to consider them as 'insurance' against getting wet, rather than a licence to roll around in puddles at night. With that in mind, we tested out 10 of the best 4-season bags currently on the market: eight down and two synthetic. Before getting stuck in, however, the Test Team sat down for their traditional pre-test chat...

Paul: So this month we are looking at 4-season sleeping bags; before we start looking at the features we are looking for, how do you define '4 season'?

TEST TEAM

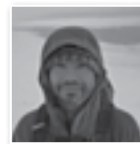
Meet the Group Test team



PAUL SMITH
Gloucestershire-based mountaineering and kayaking instructor who works full-time running his business Rock & Water Adventures.



BECCA SMITH
ML and SPA award holder Becca has been playing in the outdoors for as long as she can remember – climbing, kayaking and expeds around the world.



ROBERT LAVIN
A qualified teacher, field studies tutor and freelance outdoor instructor with a penchant for the hardship of remote expeditions in snow-covered terrain.

Becca: Well if we were to say that 3-season bags need to cope with temperatures down to just below freezing, then for 4-season use I would be looking for sleeping bags that can cope with at least -5 degrees C as a starting point.

Rob: I tend to agree with Becca and look for a sleeping bag in the temperature band of -5 to -15 using the Comfort Limit and Lower Limit ratings in the EN test information

that the manufacturers now commonly supply with their products. These figures are only a guide, because some people feel the cold more than others, but they are a useful point of reference.

Paul: Of the EN ratings, which are the important figures to look for?

Becca: Well, women need to look at the Comfort Limit and men the Lower Limit; the Extreme figure is the temperature at which a bag will keep a typical woman alive in; so, worse-case scenarios basically.

Paul: What factors affect how warm you are in a sleeping bag?

Rob: The person in the bag has the most affect. How warm a sleeper they are, if they have eaten before going to sleep, the clothing that they have on; these are all factors that need to be taken into account.

Paul: Clothing is an important issue that is often overlooked. I'm certainly wearing more when using a sleeping bag in winter; a minimum of a base layer top and bottoms, and almost always a pair of thick socks. As it gets colder, the more I will put on. What you are lying on has an affect as well, so matching your sleeping mat to the conditions will help with how warm your sleeping bag will feel.

Becca: How the sleeping bag is constructed and the features that it has will make a massive difference to both the warmth of the sleeping bag and its cost.

Rob: Cost is an important factor, but you do get what you pay for in terms of the quality of the products to a certain point. A 4-season sleeping bag has many more components, fill and fabrics than a 1-season bag, and that will



Checking ease-of-use of zips and the distribution of down in the bags

“What you are lying on has an affect as well, so matching your sleeping mat to the conditions will help with how warm your sleeping bag will feel.”



Pack size is important, as well as weight



Hood is vital for retaining heat

Group test

1. Montane Deep Heat £550
2. Mountain Equipment Snowline SL £590
3. Salewa Flare £550
4. Deuter Neosphere -15 £425
5. Haglofs Perseus -26 £800
6. The North Face Darkstar -29 £290
7. Marmot Lithium £440
8. Mountain Hardwear Lamina 0 £145
9. Mountain Hardwear Phantom 0 £470
10. Rab Andes 800 £560





“The distribution of the insulation is important; I tend to move around very little in my sleep so prefer less insulation on the base of the sleeping bag, but more targeted around my chest and feet.”

be reflected in the price.

Paul: In terms of features, I would be looking for a bag that has zip and neck baffles, along with a close-fitting hood.

Becca: I would want to check the construction of the internal baffles. There are a number of different construction methods; the minimum for this type of bag is a simple box wall design, though V baffles are structurally the strongest shape and produce the most thermally-efficient design, since the baffles tend to overlap, but tend to weigh more and add to the price.

Rob: Most of the sleeping bags that we have on test use a construction method somewhere between the two types that Becca describes. It is referred to as ‘trapezoid baffle’, which gives good structural strength and stability, which leads to excellent insulation control and, in the case of down, improved loft. Because the trapezoids overlap, cold spots are minimised.

Paul: I can’t believe it has taken this long to mention the down itself! Is that the only insulation to consider for 4-season use, or does synthetic insulation still have a place?

Becca: For me it’s down all of the way. 4-season sleeping bags tend to be much bigger by

the nature of the increased amount of insulation, so any help in reducing the size of the bag in terms of compressibility and weight is a major bonus.

Rob: With all of the different hydrophobic treatments for down that are now available, combined with modern shell DWR finishes, you don’t need to be as careful with a down sleeping bag as you needed to be in the past. Having said that, I would still consider taking a synthetic sleeping bag if I was heading somewhere where I could be certain that my sleeping bag would/could get soaked.

Paul: Is there anything that you would be personally looking for?

Becca: I really like a full-length zip or, at the very least, a three quarter-length one, so that I can slightly open up the bottom half of the bag to aid with ventilation. I’m also looking for ground-level side seams, as these maximise the thermal efficiency of the sleeping bag by allowing the single top-layer to wrap fully around the body.

Paul: I do like ground-level seams, as I have found in the past that less cold spots develop, but the downside to them is that the zip is further around the body and closer to the

ground, making it much more awkward to do the sleeping bag up or, worse, trying to find your way out of it in the middle of the night!

Rob: The distribution of the insulation is important; I tend to move around very little in my sleep so prefer less insulation on the base of the sleeping bag, but more targeted around my chest and feet. Personally, I also get cold knees, so more insulation around there wouldn’t go amiss, or I will just continue doing my usual trick of wrapping my down jacket around my knees.

Paul: That wouldn’t work too well for me, as I have a habit of sleeping on my front, even in a bag, unless I can manage to turn around in the bag itself, which is more likely in a 4-season bag as I like them a little bit roomier; this is so I can wear more clothes if I need to, but also so I can store other items in the bag to stop them from freezing; items like a water bottle, possibly a fuel canister - if we are using gas stoves - and any electronic devices: phone and camera mainly.

Becca: All that equipment doesn’t leave much space for you, does it! I do like a snug fit myself, so any sleeping bag that has a close fit or a hugging fit like some of the bags that are using elasticated linings now, I do tend to prefer.

Paul: Is there anything else we should mention before we wrap up?

Becca: Anyone buying a down bag must remember they need to look after it properly if they expect it to retain its warmth properties. Firstly they need to store it loose in the cotton storage sack it comes with; not compressed in its stuffsack, which could result in the down losing its ability to loft. Secondly, down bags are hard to clean so it’s definitely worth getting a liner so that you don’t need to clean them so often.

Paul: On that note, let’s start testing these bags out!



Checking the hood arrangements on the various bags

MONTANE DEEP HEAT £550

Since their debut at the Outdoor trade show, Friedrichshafen, in 2013, we have reviewed two of Montane’s range of six sleeping bags, the Prism and the Minimus. In this test we got to try out a third – and the warmest bag in their line-up – the Deep Heat, with a claimed EN comfort rating of -12°C and comfort limit of -20°C. It has the same ‘flipper’ footbox construction that is used across the Montane bag range, and the outer fabric is a mini rip-stop version of Pertex Endurance, which is highly water and wind resistant as well as being reasonably breathable. Insulation is provided by a 1,000g of 800+ fillpower goose down, which is certified as being non-live plucked and non-force fed. The down is held in place in a range of different sized and orientated baffles; trapezoidal box-walled vertical baffles across the chest and horizontal baffles along the base of the sleeping and around lower legs and feet. This well considered layout maximises heat retention even whilst sleeping on the side, but is not so good if you move around a lot during sleep and spend a large proportion of your time on your front, as it feels like there is much more down distributed on top and around the sides of the sleeping bag.

The Deep Heat is packed with features that you would expect in a sleeping bag of this type; two-way, 3/4-length zip, zip baffles, internal



Lots of good design features on the Deep Heat

pockets, neck baffles and a close-fitting hood, but it’s the slight adjustments and design tweaks that Montane have added that really make the difference. For instance, the zip is positioned to allow ease of use, yet you are unlikely to lie on it; there are two zip baffles that overlap to ensure that there are no draughts; and the detail in the 3D zip guard means that it is almost impossible to snag the zip, even when you try to. The hood has a small peak, which is designed to give improved weather resistance if the Deep Heat is used on its own whilst bivvying, but also serves a secondary purpose of minimising the build-up of condensation from direct contact with the inner tent. The soft, brushed microfleece on the inside

of the bag next to the chin provides additional comfort as does the split-face drawcords, giving you precise control over the volume around the face. Montane have equipped this sleeping bag with an elasticated cord that reduces the volume around the back of the head, similar in nature to what you may find on a waterproof jacket; this aids fit and comfort, as well as increasing thermal efficiency so that the user doesn’t need to wear a hat. The only downside is that we felt that the cord was too long and got in the way, but that could be easily adjusted with a pair of scissors

Verdict: An excellent choice of sleeping bag, if you like a snug fit.

MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT SNOWLINE SL £590



High quality, traceable down is big selling point

The Snowline SL is the lightest sleeping bag in Mountain Equipment’s Extreme SL range. It uses very high quality 850+ fillpower down and the technical engineering of their Extreme range, but in a temperature range more suited to non-expedition use, while remaining light, easily packable and, more importantly, non-bulky. The shell is constructed from Drilite Loft SL, which weighs in at 36g per m² and has a Hydrostatic Head of 1500mm; the result is the down insulation has excellent water-resistant protection without the penalty of additional weight. The baffles are a combination of standard box walls and trapezoid 2:1, great for increased structural strength with its

steeply-angled side walls and greater seam overlap. This trapezoid ratio maximises thermal efficiency and loft whilst minimising cold spots, and the combination means that the down is carefully distributed to the areas that need it. The side seams are at ground level, giving the user a full top cover of insulation; a bit like the wrap-around effect of a duvet!

The insulation itself is the very best goose down that Mountain Equipment can get their hands on. Sourced from Western Russia, with an actual cluster content of 93% (so better than the 90/10 that is more normal for down products) and is individually tested to ensure its fillpower as well as being Down Codex audited (for more info on this,

go to www.thedownproject.me.uk). Each sleeping bag comes with a 12-digit code allowing you to trace the down’s background if you wish to do so.

Mountain Equipment describe the cut of the Snowline as having a ‘mountain fit’, which basically means that it has a semi-tapered mummy profile. In use, the test team felt that the bag gave a ‘snug’ fit; this was partially down to the elasticated lining stitching on the top half of the bag which minimises the dead airspace around the body, while also pulling fabric away from the down, allowing it to loft to full effect. Mountain Equipment claim that a sleeping bag with this EXL technology will be 2°C warmer than one without it. It’s a good idea, but it may mean you don’t have enough room to keep anything else in the bag with you that you want to keep warm overnight, such as boots, drinks, water etc.

The two-way, 3/4-length zip has got a very effective double baffle which is protected by robust looking webbing tape. While the neck baffle was a good size, the use of a pop button to secure it left the test team divided; the main complaint being that it was awkward to find and do up in the dark! Both the neck baffle and the hood were easy to adjust thanks to elasticated drawcords.

Verdict: Excellent-quality down, with a snug fit and water-resistant shell.



SALEWA FLARE -18 £550

The Flare -18 is constructed around a 750g filling of 700+ fillpower goose down, but the big selling point is that Salewa have developed – in cooperation with the innovative Swiss company Schoeller Technologies – the world's first antibacterial silver treatment for down fillings. This treatment has been used for a couple of years now on baselayers, the idea being that silver is effective against the bacteria that cause odours. The silver ions destroy enzymes within the bacteria, meaning that the bacteria dies off and, more importantly for us, that a treated sleeping bag doesn't smell even after intensive use. The added benefit is that a down sleeping bag may finally be an option for those individuals that suffer from dust allergies.

The outer shell is constructed from two different types of 20-denier nylon; a tighter weaved, more hardwearing rip-stop along the sides, around the feet and the bottom half of the base of the sleeping bag, gives additional protection to the down insulation at the points that the Flare may come into direct contact with an inner tent or the sides of a snow hole; a slightly softer-to-touch, larger-square rip-stop is used for the rest of the body. There are also two soft panels on either side of the neck, both inside and outside the sleeping bag, which have been added to increase the flexibility and add to the comfort



Flare scores points for its robust design and easy operation

Trek & Mountain
EDITOR'S CHOICE

levels of the user while they move around during sleep; they also seem to aid moisture transfer when the bag is completely done up. The down insulation is kept in place by the use of 'V-chambers' (vertical V-shaped chambers) which provide excellent stabilisation and minimises cold spots.

A single-way, 3/4-length zip provided easy access to the inside of the sleeping bag, but most of the test team felt that they would have preferred a two-way zip to aid with ventilation. A soft-to-touch, 30-denier, smooth-faced nylon is used for the majority of the lining, as well as being the main fabric used in the construction of the combination double-zip and neck baffle. Around the inside of the footbox, Salewa have used a very

heavy weight of nylon, which means the Flare should easily cope with people getting into it whilst fully clothed and wearing big boots in extreme conditions, without damaging the lining. The sleeping bag's wide-ish cut aids this concept and still remains comfortable when wearing multiple layers. The hood fits well and the closure around the face is easy to use with just one main cordlock to operate. There's an extra hidden cord on the front of the head that can be used to adjust the volume of the hood. The Flare comes with a large storage sack and compression stuff sack.

Verdict: A hardwearing design that appears to be built to last.

DEUTER NEOSPHERE -15 £425



Some good features on this well-made bag

Both Deuter's Exosphere and Neosphere ranges of sleeping bags are based around their Thermo Stretch Comfort system in order to achieve maximum insulating qualities with a minimal amount of weight. For this test we have the Neosphere -15, the warmest down model in the range.

The shell is made from Deuter's own Diamond fabric and has two additional Dryzones to prevent the transfer of moisture. The 30-denier outer is extremely tightly woven making it a featherlight micro-fibre material – strong, windproof, durable, quick drying and down proof. Reinforcement threads in the weft and weave provide further rip-stopping qualities. The bag's 'dryzones' are

water repellent areas positioned in the obvious potential contact points with the side walls of a tent, the feet and the hood. The whole of the outer shell is also treated with a DWR finish to help protect the sleeping bag in damp conditions. The full-length two-way zip gives access to the slightly softer feeling inner lining, we didn't have any issues with the zip snagging this material, thanks to the protective strips. When opening up the sleeping bag, the Thermo Stretch comfort system is obvious, as you can see where the material gets slightly gathered together both on the top and lower halves of the bag. When we tested the synthetic Exosphere as part of the 3-season sleeping bag review we were really pleased with

the amount of expansion that was possible. Sadly with the Neosphere the amount of expansion is nowhere near the same. However, the shell does have a roomy cut and this elasticated system does appear to help keep the loft of the down, which can only enhance the insulation by providing even more space for the down to expand.

The 675+ fillpower goose down is held in place thanks to opposing diagonal trapezoid chambers, along with a full-length chamber alongside the zip to ensure that any cold spots are minimised. The neck baffle is a good size and has a double Velcro closure system, as well as the customary elasticated draw cord. This drawcord does sit very close to the neck which the test team did comment about, as they would have preferred from a comfort point of view it to be buried in the down so that they didn't notice/feel it. The comfort and fit of the hood was good and all of the testers like the split single cord adjustments, flat tape for the top half and marginally stretching cord for the lower half, meant that in the dark it was easy to identify which one to adjust. Deuter supply the Neosphere with an excellent hardwearing compression sack, as well as the now standard mesh storage sack.

Verdict: A good compromise on price, weight and temperature ratings.

HAGLOFS PERSEUS -26 £800

The Perseus -26, Haglofs' flagship sleeping bag, is available in three sizes and is designed primarily for expedition use and as such is the warmest bag included in this group test. The most obvious feature is the half-length central zip – this feature alone had all of the test team excited as not only did it make getting in and out of the sleeping bag very easy, but it also allowed the user to carry out straight forward tasks like cooking, eating and reading, while keeping the shoulders and head covered. The other added bonus was that zip snagging was reduced as you weren't trying to do the zip up at an awkward angle. The question has to be asked why more manufacturers don't have sleeping bags with this design feature.

The outer shell is constructed from two types of 20-denier rip-stop Pertex, with the more robust Endurance at the obvious wear points of the feet, shoulders and around the hood, and the lighter Quantum used for the rest of the body. This combination of materials provides an excellent compromise between weight and durability. A durable water repellent treatment has also been used to keep the Perseus dry, warm and clean for longer. Haglofs have decided to ensure that it doesn't contain perfluorooctanoic acid, which means that the finish used causes less harm to the environment. A trapezoidal box construction is used to maximise warmth, with insulation being



provided by 800-fillpower European goose down that meets Bluesign approval standards. Synthetic insulation in the form of Quad+ Fusion has been used in two areas on the base of the sleeping bag, both places where the down is more likely to be compressed while sleeping. The first large panel is around the back of the head, shoulders and down to the waist, with a second smaller panel around the heels and backs of the lower legs.

The Perseus is lined with a soft 15-denier plain polyamide. Inside, on the left hand side there is a large mesh pocket, accessed by a zip near to one of the two main zip draft tubes. The neck baffle is a good size and joins together automatically with the aid of Velcro; when the zip is done up, it can be

adjusted thanks to an elasticated drawcord that is positioned on the right shoulder. The hood is shaped asnd allows you to simply adjust the opening around the face; this is achieved through a hidden, elasticated cord located by the right cheek. The stretchy nature of the lining, means that it hugs as you move without feeling restricted, but it also means that there is plenty of additional room for wearing extra layers. Haglofs state that there is enough room for you to wear a down suit inside the Perseus, and we are happy to take their word on that.

Verdict: A superb, warm bag – ideal for expeditions in the Greater Ranges.

TNF DARKSTAR -29 £290



The Darkstar is The North Face's expedition sleeping bag designed for use in low temperatures, either on polar or high altitude expeditions, and due to its synthetic insulation it could be a prime choice for when things get a little moist. The insulation is Climashield Prism, as found in The North Face's classic the Cat's Meow bag, but in the case of the Darkstar there is significantly more of it. According to Climashield, their Prism filling requires less energy than any other insulation fill to keep the occupier at a pre-defined temperature, with the figures suggesting only a 15% decrease in performance when wet.

A 20-denier rip-stop Pertex shell keeps the

insulation stable, and its 'expedition cut' (i.e. it's a bit more roomy than normal, so that you can wear more clothing when inside it) was a big hit with the test team, although the footbox felt too large and particularly shapeless when not wearing boots. The full-length, two-way zip had The North Face's excellent glow-in-the-dark zip pull, which made identifying and using the zip at night very straightforward. The reinforcing tape alongside the baffle helped to prevent the zip from snagging and, hidden inside the baffle, was a small zipped pocket; perfect for storing ear plugs or a watch. The neck baffle was more than adequate with two excellent touches: the first being the elasticated draw-cord being positioned on the front of the

neck, making adjustment really straightforward, while the second was the inclusion of micro-fleece edging where the baffle would come in contact with the body.

When getting in the Darkstar for the first time, all of the test team commented on how thick and lofty the insulation was and particularly on how warm it felt. The insulation seems to be distributed very evenly around the sleeping bag, so this could be a good choice for someone who moves around a lot during the night. The simple design and fit of the hood was also appreciated – with only one elasticated cord to pull, it was deemed a lot less fussy than some of the other designs tested.

As well as being supplied with the standard mesh storage sack, the Darkstar is supplied with a stuff sack. Clearly some thought has gone into its design; it works just like a normal compression stuff sack, but is shaped more like an unpadded rucksack, as that is exactly what it is. With unpadded straps, a hanging loop as well as a simple lid with ladder lock closures to it, such a simple design adjustment that means that you can have a small day sack handy when space is at a premium.

Verdict: Bulky, but a good price for the warmth it offers – the Darkstar is an obvious choice when facing damp and cold conditions.

MARMOT LITHIUM £440

The Lithium is Marmot's lightest 4-season bag and is available in two lengths: regular and long. The bag is filled with 870g of 850+ fillpower goose down which has been treated with 'Down Defender', a DWR treatment that coats the individual plumes of down during the cleaning process. It offers moisture protection for the down when it is used in damp environments, with its main aim being to help the down from losing its loft and clumping together when it is exposed to water, giving greater warmth benefits to the user. As well as significantly increasing the performance of the down in damp conditions this treatment also enhances the down's integrity and durability. The main construction of the sleeping bag takes place in China, with the insulation added and the sleeping bag finished in Santa Rosa, California.

The outer fabric of the Lithium is Pertex Quantum, and this 20-denier mini-ripstop fabric is pretty light, yet hard-wearing. The colour choice of bright orange, combined with the slightly transparent nature of the Pertex, does mean that you can see the darker-coloured down contained inside it, giving it a 'mottled' effect. The DWR finish provides additional protection to the down insulation. The lining fabric is a sensible black colour and is constructed from a soft-to-touch 30-denier nylon. The trapezoidal footbox, which is wider at the toes than at the heels, makes for a



comfortable foot position with plenty of space for the wearing of boot liners, while from the knees down the baffles stretch meaning that as you move around in your sleep, cold spots don't develop whilst comfort levels are maintained. The hood fitted well and was straightforward to adjust, with the flat tape of the upper hood draw cord being highlighted as particularly comfortable. The neck baffle doesn't have any means to join it together, which is a clever move by Marmot as it means that there is no pop-button or Velcro closer to lie on, but when you tightened up the elasticated draw-cord a slight gap formed near to the zip. This isn't an issue as the cut of the hood means that there was no draught as long as the

hood was adjusted around the face carefully. During the test, a few little niggles were found, the first being that the contoured shape caused a few testers to feel constricted which, in itself wasn't an issue, but the shoulder area felt particularly narrow; this was highlighted when you tried to completely close the full length (left hand opening only) zip, as there wasn't much room to do this easily. The Lithium is supplied with a mesh storage bag, but the simple draw-cord stuff sack left the test team disappointed.

Verdict: A tight fit but very light, and suitable for those occasional snow holing trips.

MOUNTAIN HARDWEAR LAMINA 0 £145



When Mountain Hardwear set out to produce a warm and affordable synthetic sleeping bag capable of dealing with cold temperatures, the bag that they came up with was the Lamina 0, with a warmth rating down to zero degrees Fahrenheit (hence the name), or a chilly -18°C.

The shell is made from 40-denier micro ripstop nylon and there is an obvious lack of stitching when compared to other sleeping bags in this test. This is thanks to the use of a fabric welding technique that could easily be mistaken for small taped seams. The fabric itself feels pretty soft to touch, more like the sort of fabric used on the inside of most sleeping bags, but has been

treated with durable water repellent finish (DWR). There is a small, zipped pocket running parallel to the zip, perfect for storing your ear plugs and eye mask.

The Lamina is lined with 40-denier polyester taffeta which appears to be hardwearing and again lacking in seams, which added to the comfort levels. Despite its low price, the test team were really pleased to find a good-quality zip on the Lamina; the full-length, two-way zip made access and ventilation easy thanks to its size and large zip pull. Behind it was a small baffle which did an adequate job of blocking draughts. The neck baffle is a thin, flat affair that the whole test team thought was just a bit

pointless, as it tended to just lie flat and not really stop draughts. It could be adjusted independently, but the positioning of the cords at almost the furthest point away from the neck meant that most of the baffle was ineffective, unless the cords were over tightened. There is a small pocket to put the ends of these cords into, to help stop you from getting wrapped up in them.

The shaped hood fitted well, and the split adjustment allowed for the top and bottom halves of the closure to be independently adjusted. Having the ends of the cords outside the hood opening does mean that it's slightly more awkward to do up, but then the ends of the cords don't end up in your face; a major bonus. We found the cut of the Lamina to be generous, with plenty of space to move around, and the thin nature of the Thermal.Q meant that it felt light on the body while still maintaining sufficient heat at the temperatures that we tested the sleeping bag at. However all of the testers were certain that they didn't feel confident in using the Lamina when the temperatures were getting close to -18°C, so we'd suggest this bag not be pushed to the limits of its paper specification.

Verdict: An affordable option for the occasional winter backpacker.



MOUNTAIN HARDWEAR PHANTOM 0 £470

The Phantom 0 is aimed at those backpackers and climbers who need to save weight in order to push on that little bit further/higher; Mountain Hardwear have, therefore, selected the materials and carefully designed this sleeping bag with the aim of producing a super-lightweight 4-season bag and, in fact, this is the lightest sleeping bag in the whole test.

The outer shell of the Phantom lacks the usual rip-stop pattern, with the filament weave 10-denier nylon feeling particularly smooth as well as being incredibly light. It is almost translucent, allowing you to clearly see the down clusters through it, giving the shiny red fabric that mottled look that you get when super-thin outer fabrics are used over down. The same material is used to line the inside of the hood, around the chin and the top half of the neck baffle. The neck baffle is an almost-flat, two-piece design, with each piece being independently adjustable; the rear through the use of a flat piece of tape, while the shaped (there is a cut-out for the neck) front piece uses normal elasticated cord. In use, this baffle naturally sits around the shoulders and neck, with the idea being that it creates a 'soft seal'. There is a small, triangular, zipped pocket above the baffle that also has a secondary Velcro-secured pocket behind it. A slightly more robust-feeling nylon is used to line the rest



of the sleeping bag. There is another small pocket below the neck baffle, but it has no way of securing its contents. The two-way, full-length zip has a small insulated baffle which is protected from snagging by two strips of heavyweight nylon.

Insulation is provided by 800-fillpower goose down, which has been treated with Q.Shield; this is Mountain Hardwear's own treatment process that sees down fibres infused with a permanent water repellency that helps maintain its natural insulating performance, even when exposed to moisture. The close nature of the baffle spacing is intended to maximise the loft of the down filling, while at the same time minimise any potential

cold spots. The footbox allows for a natural foot position, with any excess or unnecessary material removed, again to maximise warmth.

The cut of the sleeping bag is referred to as 'Performance Mummy' which, in practice, means 'snug'. This is great for maximising warmth and minimising weight, but it left the testers divided as it was either too tight, or provided only just the right amount of space. Mountain Hardwear supply the Phantom with a nylon mesh storage sack and a compression stuff sack.

Verdict: The lightest sleeping bag on test, and a good choice for lightweight trekking or mountaineering forays.

RAB ANDES 800 £560



The Andes 800 feels robust and purposeful when you pick it up, and with only Rab's Expedition range and the Andes 800's bigger brother, the Andes 1000, warmer than it, you know that it is a seriously toasty bag ideal for winter or high altitude use. The Andes 800 and its female-specific sibling, the Andes 800W, are both rated with a comfort limit of -22°C; Rab have decided that the EN test doesn't accurately represent real-life performance when used with sleeping bags with over 800g of down so, instead, the temperature rating comes from a combination of the EN test results, the British Standards Tog test and feedback from their own test team, with the aim

of giving a much more realistic result.

Pertex Endurance is used as the outer fabric and on the inside of the bag in high-wear areas such as the footbox, zip and neck baffles and inside the hood, while Pertex Microlight is used for the rest of the lining. Insulation is provided by 800g of 800-fillpower European goose down and, as is common practice now, the down has received a hydrophobic treatment. Rab have developed their fluorocarbon-free treatment alongside Nikwax, and it is applied to the raw down at source in order to make it more effective and durable in the long term. This, combined with the sleeping bag being filled in Derbyshire, means Rab have complete quality control over the

whole process (more info at <http://rab.uk.com/reference/technology/down-insulation/>)

The shape and fit can be described as a loose performance mummy; there are all the signs of a standard mummy sleeping bag design tapered in towards the feet, full enclosed around the chest and head, but there is just that little bit more room, allowing for the user to wear additional layers if conditions and situations dictate. There's a little less room around the lower legs, as the Andes tapers in more than normal to eliminate wasted space, but the top of the footbox is angled in such a way as to allow the wearing of boot liners. The position of the 3/4-length, two-way zip is close to the ground when you are lying down and this did mean that a few of the tester found it a little awkward to use. The neck baffle was a simple and effective design that was easy to use with no Velcro or pop buttons to get in the way, and adjustment was provided by an elasticated drawcord which is sensibly positioned below the baffle. The hood was easy to adjust as well, and the addition of the face baffles was a positive addition that was mentioned by all of the test team. The Andes is supplied with a cotton storage sack along with a roll-top dry bag compression stuff sack.

Verdict: A high quality bag, with an excellent pedigree.

HOW THEY COMPARE

The tech specs of the sleeping bags in our test



Model	Price	Weight	Filling	Filling (Type)	Filling (Weight)	Comfort	Limit	Extreme
1. Montane Deep Heat	£550	1729g	Down	800+	1000g	-12°C	-20°C	-42°C
2. Mountain Equipment Snowline SL	£590	1402g	Down	850	800g	-9°C	-17°C	-37°C
3. Salewa Flare -18	£550	1530g	Down	700+	750g	-9°C	-18°C	-37°C
4. Deuter Neosphere -15	£425	1599g	Down	675+	830g	-7°C	-15°C	-33°C
5. Haglofs Perseus -26	£800	1870g	Down	800	1100g	-17°C	-26°C	-50°C
6. TNF Darkstar -29	£290	2079g	Synthetic	Climashield Prism 800	n/a	n/a	-29°C	n/a
7. Marmot Lithium	£440	1333g	Down	850+	870g	-7.3°C	-14.4°C	-34.6°C
8. Mountain Hardwear Lamina 0	£145	1567g	Synthetic	Thermal Q	n/a	n/a	-18°C	n/a
9. Mountain Hardwear Phantom 0	£470	1170g	Down	800	793g	-9°C	-17°C	n/a
10. Rab Andes 800	£560	1525g	Down	800	800g	n/a	-22°C	n/a

FINAL VERDICT

Summing up the overall impressions of the Test Team



Choosing a sleeping bag is a very personal choice, even more so when we move beyond three seasons and start looking for suitable options for winter or expeditions. It can be really hard to find the perfect one that works for everyone – after considering the fit, there will always need to be a compromise on design features and /or personal preferences as well as cost.

The **Haglofs Perseus -26** and in particular its centre zip was very much favoured by the whole test team, but we felt that its price and temperature rating were more suited for Greater Range expedition use.

So when asking the Test Team to choose their favourite sleeping bag for 4-season use, the fact that all three agreed on the same sleeping bag has got to say something. So we take great pleasure in awarding the Editor's Choice award to the **Salewa Flare -18**. With a roomy shape that will allow for additional layers, a simple yet effective neck baffle and hood combination, and with ample reinforcing in all of the right areas, we felt that the Flare offered the best all-round combination of features for the money.



Trek & Mountain
EDITOR'S CHOICE

