From featherweight hardshells to do-it-all softshells, here are the best products for staying dry on the move in the backcountry.
The Gamma SL was this year’s trail wardrobe MVP: It’s protective against chill winds and light precip, yet ultrabreathable; stretchy enough for bendy activities; and trim-fitting on its own yet comfortable over a few underlayers. It conquered three seasons’ worth of hikes, mountain bike rides, and trail runs. The double-weave nylon/Spandex material proved supremely breathable, even in pea-soup humidity before Hurricane Dorian made landfall on the Canadian coast and in temps up to the mid-70s. And it kept us dry in a summit squall in Montana’s Rattlesnake Wilderness.

THE DETAILS

“I love the packability—I can squish it down to the size of a grapefruit,” one tester says. The Gamma SL’s “flattering, streamlined” cut extends over the butt for added protection, and two large pockets fit a map or gloves. The elastic-lined cuffs and hem stayed put even when biking. Bummer: Expensive. $225; 10.4 oz.; m’s XS-XXL, w’s XS-XL

BEST SOFTSHELL
ARC’TERYX
GAMMA SL HOODY
Fire up your comfort, stoke, and fun in the backcountry with these kit-completing products.
WOMEN’S

A
VERSATILE FLEECE
ARC’TERYX KYANITE LT HOODY
If this hoodie had a dating profile it would read... 5.3 oz. (10); 8-18

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my bra was already dry after my 30 minute car ride home,” one tester reports. Fit note: The Run It All is most supportive for A and B cups—Cs and Ds may want to look elsewhere. $30; 2.5 oz. (34 A/B); 32-38 A/B

B
FASHION-FORWARD TANK MAMMUT CRASHIANO TOP
Whether we were trail running, climbing, hiking, or hustling around town, if we were going to be sweating, we reached for this flowy tank top. The cut is both functional and flattering: It combines a front made from four-way stretch polyester that feels—and looks—like chiffon with a tightly woven mesh back and a keyhole cutout that provides superb ventilation. We were also impressed by the wrinkle-resistant fabric, which passed our “ball-it-then-wear-it” test with flying colors. And did we mention it looks great? “I wore this top to a job interview, then straight to a multipitch climb in Eldorado Canyon State Park afterward without changing,” one Colorado tester says. “I crushed the climb and got the job. How many shirts can you trust to do that?” $79; 12 oz. (w’s M); w’s XS-XXL

C
WARM-WEATHER BOTTOM MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT DYNAMO SKORT
Your softshell hiking pants and bike shorts had a love child, and the result is glorious. The cut of the stretchy Dynamo hits just above the knee, which is long enough for coverage during squatting or scrambling but short enough to give you free range of motion. While the built-in shorts of other skorts tend to bunch up, causing dreaded thigh chafe, the ones in the Dynamo stay in place. “I’m never going back to shorts after wearing this skort on a trip to Missouri Lakes in Colorado’s Holy Cross Wilderness,” one tester says. “I felt unrestricted and protected trekking up snowfields, over two passes, and high-stepping over fallen trees in an avalanche-debris field.” Testers also applauded the three generous pockets that can each hold a cell phone, lip balm, and energy bar. $80; 5.3 oz. (10); 8-18

D
VERSATILE FLEECE
CRASHIANO MAMMUT RESILIENT LEGGINGS
in Bears Ears without snagging, and even after dozens of washes, these tights have yet to lose their shape. Almost as important as durability are functional pockets, and the Kalpana delivers on that end, too. Two zippered thigh pockets are roomy enough for a smartphone, and the four way stretch fabric never restricted our movement. “While exploring Arch Canyon in Utah, my group decided to trail blaze up some loose, steep rocks. The tights made me feel as agile as Simone Biles, allowing me to high-step to stable footholds,” one tester says. $79; 12 oz. (w’s M); w’s XS-XXL

E
SHIRLEY LEGGINGS SHERPA ADVENTURE GEAR KALPANA HIKE TIGHT
We love good trail tights, but not all leggings hold up in the backcountry. The Kalpana bucks that trend with a 76 percent nylon fabric that can take a beating: It stood up to off-trail exploration through grabby brush and sliding down rocks

has a brushed fleece interior that had the best next-to-skin feel of any midlayer we tried this year. And even though the Kyanite LT is thin, it was warm enough for one tester to wear alone on a two-day ascent of Sky Pilot Mountain in Squamish, British Columbia in just-above-freezing conditions. The two zippered hand pockets are nice, but we found that they sagged when we put something as heavy as a cell phone or apple in them. Drawback: True love don’t come cheap. $149; 10.4 oz.; w’s XS-XL, m’s S-XXL

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