

A Rough Guide to Winter kit

By Paul Skuse

Let's assume that you've already got your hands on the mandatory FRA kit (suitable shoes, taped sealed waterproofs, hat, gloves, whistle, compass and bag to stick it all in – I could happily write reams about these bits of kit alone). Does this mean you're kitted out for winter running? Not even close, especially if you're a kit freak like me. Of course, you need all the basics but every now and then you come across something that's not strictly essential but you just know life will be better for having it. Here's my list of random items that I'd recommend in the bleak midwinter.

- 1) Emergency bivvy bag. This really should be considered essential kit. This isn't like the old heavy-duty orange plastic bags I used to have as a kid but is a small, lightweight and a potential lifesaving bit of kit. Tim Budd (GMRT) swears by them and has written about them in his Tested to Destruction Blog (always worth a read). Made of laminated foil with a bright orange outer, they weigh next to nothing (about 100g), pack to the size of an apple, cost less than £20 and could save your life. The one I bought is made by Sol though there are plenty of different ones out there so shop around. The one from Harrier UK looks very good value for money. If you haven't already got one, get one and take it with you when playing out on the tops, no matter what the season. Hopefully you'll never need it but I bet you'll be glad you've got one if the worst happens.
- 2) Waterproof over mitts. Gloves are ace till they get wet. After that, they are worse than useless as they do little more than keep the cold water pressed against your hands. I can't remember who first recommended these to but when the rain is coming down and your hands are burning with the cold, these are worth their weight in gold. I managed to get a cheap pair of Tuff bags by Extremities (rrp £60 these days which is way too much money) but also got a second pair from a brand I'd never heard of for £20 and they work just as well. When the weather is double grim or if your hands are constantly being used to help scramble through the snow, pull these out the backpack, stick them over the gloves and you'll soon be toasty warm again. Additional warmth can be also added with warmer gloves and mitts such as the Montane Primaloft range (Andy Oliver swears by them). If you really struggle with cold hands, handwarmers should also find their way into the backpack. It's the best way of getting warmth back into your hands. Again, this is advice from Tim Budd who knows a thing or two.
- 3) Neoprene socks. Some folk like breathable waterproof socks such as Sealskinz. I have had a pair and thought they were okay but they just didn't keep my feet as warm as the neoprenes. Neoprene socks come in different thicknesses and my preferred winter option is combining the thinner hot socks from Rooster with merino wool socks beneath them. You will still get wet feet but this comb seems to keep the worst of the cold at bay. I think half the club use neoprenes and don't think many who have them venture out without them when the weather has turned. The key drawback is the additional width which can mean it's a bit of a squeeze in your usual fell shoes. A quick jiggle with your laces before running can give you a bit more room or you can have a winter specific pair of shoes that are a half size larger than the norm.
- 4) Spikes/crampons. I have some Yaktrax that simply slip over the shoe and are velcroed into place. In truth, I rarely get much use out of them: they just sit, strapped on the back of my pack for those just in case moments. There is something quite satisfying about being able to keep moving forward when all around are giving it the Bambi on ice routine. They aren't that comfy as the rubber bands do pull the toes back a bit but for truly icy sections, they're

worth the discomfort. I know some of you prefer the Kahoola micro spikes which I've yet to try so if anyone could give us a side-by-side comparison, I'd be keen to see the results. (One downside I've heard from a few folks is that the rubber on the Yaktrax can tear leaving you up a certain creek). Here's a link to Tim Budd's thoughts on the topic: <https://testedtodestruction.blogspot.com/2012/02/ice-spikes-on-shoes.html>

- 5) Spiked shoes. I got a pair of Inov8 orocs years ago and they sit in the cupboard near forgotten until the ice hits. These are actually orienteering shoes with small metal spikes embedded into the sole. I think this particular shoe is long gone out of production but Inov8 now have a snow talon or whatever it's called. Icebug and Salomon also do something similar. Whatever the brand, it's just the best way of moving around when its truly icy underfoot. The downside is they might not be as comfy as other shoes due to the rigidity of the sole unit and you make a right old racket clattering around on tarmac.
- 6) Trail gaiters. I wanted to find a way to stop the snow and ice getting in under the shoe tongue and balling up around the laces. I tried using my old gaiters but they just filled up with snow when plodding through the big (knee high and above) drifts. They made a bad situation worse. Next, I tried Salomon trail gaiters. These sort of work but I'm not won over by the Velcro fastening as the snow can get it and force it open. Today in fact, I had to backtrack half a mile or so as one came off whilst hurdling drifts. I'm going to add some snap lock buckles to sort this. Jude Stansfield seems to get along with them better than I do. Maybe it's a fitting thing? I also have some very affordable Extremities Fella gaiters (a fiver) which are like a cross between shin guards and compression socks. You might look a wally but if you prefer running in shorts no matter the weather, they stop the horror of stomping through cheese grater icy crusts with bare fleas. I bet Julien Minshull wishes he had them today as he left a trail of blood from his shins all across Bleaklow. Any sort of compression sock/calf guard would be better than bare flesh on those crunchy snow days. I've just seen they also do a running gaiter for a fiver as well so that may be worth a punt.
- 7) Face mask. It's cold and wet so you pull your Buff up over your nose and mouth and two minutes later its colder and wetter than before as your breath condenses. I bought a cheap ebay special snowboarding face mask made of a warm fleece like material that velcros around the neck. Covering just the lower face and neck, this has a large opening for the nose and a mesh fabric around the mouth to prevent condensation. It has only ever been used during the beast from the East but it's good to know it's there just in case.
- 8) Ski goggles. I grabbed a couple of pairs from Aldi when they were selling them off for 75p (best bargain ever perhaps). Needed them today when on the tops with high wind and icy sleet like snow cutting into the face.
- 9) A big, dobber thermal layer. This is not so much for wearing whilst running but to have in your bag just in case you need to stop running for whatever reason. When you stop, you can get very cold, very fast. I take an ultra-lightweight down jacket for this reason. There's a whole series of debates on what to use as your thermal layer be it down, synthetic, wool, pile or fleece. As long as it's light enough to carry and keeps you warm (even when damp), it's good enough.

10) Extra food. You burn more calories in the cold so need more calories. This means more food. Anyone fancy writing up a rough guide to food on the fells? I know Kate makes a bomber flapjack (scientific fact: Ginger makes everything better!) and Emma like jaffa cakes with salted peanuts whereas I'm famously a cheese and marmite booty lover.

PS it's a good idea to check your compass is still working before heading out (they can go off/get bubbles – I've a whole box of dodgy Silva ones at school that are now useless as bubbles throw the needle off) and having the basic skills to use it. In the clag and without any GPS/phone signal, it may be your lifeline. And let someone know where you're going.

I'd love to hear your thoughts and comments about the above. Big thanks to Tim for helping me out.