

OUTDOORS



KIT OF THE WEEK

ARC'TERYX ATOM LT HOODY

This jacket for men and women is being billed as an "essential" item for all outdoorsy people.

The brand states: "Every person at head office owns at least one Atom LT; most of the women have two."

The hybrid hoody is designed to be an active-use insulation layer, offering core warmth with lots of freedom of movement and breathability.

Technical details include a moisture-resistant outer face fabric, breathable and stretch side panels and insulation from Arc'teryx's synthetic Coreloft. The full zip jacket with a hood packs down into a small pocket.

■ It is £190 from arcteryx.com

HEB OF ACTIVITY

Adventure race The Heb returns to the Outer Hebrides in 2016.

The event on September 3 and 4 includes running, mountain or hybrid biking, kayaking, a little open water swimming and navigating.

The newly formatted Heb is organised by Dirty Events.

A spokesman said: "We have planned a race with less logistical fuss, less cost, less hassle, but definitely all the adventure, excitement and fun of the old Heb."

"It will be perfect for hardened adventure racers, newcomers to the sport and everyone in between."

You can enter as a solo or pair for a cost of £250 per person.

■ See www.theheb.org



BLAZE A TRAIL

Mountain bikers are being invited to book The Ultimate Scotland Road Trip 2016.

The eight-day break, organised by Tom Hutton MTB Guiding, will visit six classic trails.

The April 2-10 trip includes guided rides in the Highlands, from Aviemore singletrack to the rugged wilderness of Torridon and Sligachan on Skye.

The cost is £1045 for the all-inclusive trip, including accommodation, all food, travel and guiding on a one-guide-to-four-clients ratio.

This is a trip for riders with good levels of stamina and the skills to ride red-graded routes.

■ See www.mtbguiding.co.uk/ultimate-road-trip.html

Along for the glide



ON SNOW PATROL
Snowshoes are a great way to hike across the wintry landscape

Have you tried?



FIONA RUSSELL

Snowshoes help you to hike up snowy Munros in much quicker time, making the outdoors a completely new type of challenge. And it's becoming more popular than ever as a great winter pursuit.

SNOWSHOEING

What is it?

Snowshoeing is centuries old and was invented for easier travel on snow. Snowshoes work by distributing the weight of the person over a larger area so feet do not sink in completely.

Now the equipment has become more sophisticated and in some countries the activity has developed into a competitive sport. In Scotland, snowshoeing is on the rise as more people discover the joys of easier hiking in snowy countryside.

Tell me more

In the past, snowshoes looked like wooden tennis racquets and felt stiff and heavy to use.

These days they are lightweight and created from aluminium or plastic. Mechanisms allow the heels to be free or fixed and many have raised features to accommodate walking up steeper slopes. Choose snowshoes according to your weight because they need to be able to support you on soft snow.

You can also add extra "tails" to improve the floatation on lighter powder snow. It is a good idea to hire and try out snowshoeing before investing in your own set.

Hire snowshoes at Nevis Range Ski Centre, see www.nevisrange.co.uk and Killin Outdoor Centre at www.killinoutdoor.co.uk

Suggested brands to buy include MSR snowshoes, see www.cascadedesigns.com and Quechua snowshoes from www.deathlon.co.uk

Anything else to know?

It doesn't take long to learn the skills of snowshoeing on the flat.



HITECH Aluminium or plastic snowshoes are lightweight and easy

Simply strap your walking boots on top of the shoes and try to walk. The snow needs to be fairly deep to walk across but it doesn't matter if it is soft or hard. Snowshoes have spikey grips underneath to stop you slipping on ice or steeper slopes.

When you reach an ascent, it's easier to walk with a raised heel and most good quality snowshoes have a small heel lift that supports the back of your foot at a higher point. To descend or walk on the flat, remove this heel-lift and carry on walking.

My adventure

Recently, my partner Gordie and I headed for the popular Munro, Beinn Ime, near Arrochar, for a winter's walk. Knowing that there would be deep snow at higher altitude, we strapped our snowshoes to our rucksacks.

At first the well-trodden path through the valley was mainly hard-packed snow and so we hiked slowly upwards in our boots. At a bealach at about 600m we attached our snowshoes and headed onto untrodden snow.

As we floated over the top of the deep snow, we caught up with

many other walkers who were carving out a path in boots.

Their progress was slow while ours felt almost twice as fast.

I could stride out over the landscape, enjoy the sensation of exercising hard and reach the destination far more quickly than normal. Many of the walkers we met looked on with jealousy and several asked us where they could buy snowshoes.

If you are looking for an alternative outing in the snowy outdoors, I would highly recommend snowshoeing.

Who is it for?

Snowshoeing is for all ages and fitness levels. You can walk a mile or 20 miles, depending on your aspirations. If you are going off the beaten track, you should be able to competently navigate.

When can I do it?

In wintry Scotland when there is a good covering of snow.

Price

The cost includes the hire of snowshoes or buying a pair. After that it is free to do. You could also join a guided snowshoe tour, such as a snowshoeing break with www.cndoscotland.com

Advice and ideas

Join me on my adventures in Scotland's great outdoors by checking out my award-winning website at www.fionaoutdoors.co.uk – you'll find lots of great information about walking, cycling, running, other outdoor activities and kit reviews.