



## Velocio Alpha Merino Air Jacket, \$249

velocio.cc

► I test a lot of jackets, and I've been looking for the ultimate cold-weather riding jacket for a while. I just found it: Velocio's Alpha Merino Air. For cool to cold weather when it's dry but frosty, there's no jacket that balances warmth and breathability better. I love merino for its anti-stink warmth. And I'm a fan of Polartec's Alpha, which looks like a long-haired fleece, for its ability to trap warmth with the same cozy feel of down without the worry of it getting compacted and losing its insulative properties when I get sweaty and wet. Velocio uses Alpha Wool as interior insulation on the sleeves, front, and collar, with Pertex Quantum Air for ultralight wind and water resistance that holds onto my body heat without making me feel sweaty or clammy. The jacket has a fleece-backed, Italian-milled, recycled polyester that lets the sweat out in back. The Merino Air's fit is streamlined, as with most Velocio clothing — I sized up. And the cut is cycling specific. It's a pricey jacket, with high ROI for riders who refuse to be sidelined by a little cold weather. Available for men and women. —*Berne Broudy*



## Ergon Gravel Bar Tape with OrthoCell Pad Set, \$30 + \$40

ergonbike.shop

► Do your hands hurt when you ride? Try Ergon's new bar tape and OrthoCell Pad Set. Made specifically for gravel riding, the 3.5mm air cell foam tape is significantly thicker and more shock-absorbing than standard bar tape. It also has a slightly sticky, textured surface for super secure grip, even without gloves. The tape spreads out the pressure and damps vibrations. My hands feel much less beaten up than they used to since I switched. Ergon provides a wrapping guide with every pack of bidirectional tape with instructions on how to wrap for more grip or more freedom of movement. Using the guide, I wrapped my bars perfectly on the first try. I added Ergon's OrthoCell kit underneath, which made my handlebars the cushiest imaginable. The kit includes 2.5mm thick pads that go over the tops of the bars and tuck under the hoods, and a second set of 2.5mm thick pads for the drops. Now, anywhere I hold my bars, the pressure is off. At 30 grams for the four-piece set, the weight gain is negligible. —*BB*

## Boot Bananas Shoe Deodorisers, \$20

bootbananas.com

► If your cycling shoes get as stinky as mine do, you'll want to try Boot Bananas Original Shoe Deodorisers. Don't judge because they're bright yellow and shaped like America's favorite fruit. These cloth bananas contain odor-absorbing salts, minerals, and plant extracts, plus lavender, lemon, patchouli, and tea-tree essential oils. Stick them in your shoes post-ride to kill odor, absorb moisture, and help moderate future stink. Each pair lasts six to 12 months with regular use, regardless of how stinky your shoes are. And in true banana fashion, when they need additional dry time, they turn brown. To use the Boot Bananas, slide one into each shoe. To dry them between uses, leave them in a sunny spot, in a dry room, or next to a heater. Store the dry Bananas in the plastic bag they came in to preserve their freshness so they're ready for the next post-ride shoe refresh. Your Bananas will turn brown as they get wet. If they're brown, dry your shoes before using the Boot Bananas, and/or dry the Bananas better between uses. —*BB*





## 7mesh Chilco Anorak, \$200

7mesh.com

► I always struggle with dressing for cool-weather riding. Most shell jackets end up leaving me sweaty, even if they're windbreakers, while fleeces don't provide enough wind-repelling warmth. 7mesh's thermal, hooded Chilco Anorak strikes the balance, with velvety grid-fleece-looking thermal insulation on the inside, and a woven, wind-repelling but still breathable outer fabric. 7mesh says that the fleece-looking layer dynamically retains or releases heat as you ride. It seems too good to be true. On every ride, even when I think I'll be too cold, this jacket has helped me regulate my temperature perfectly. A stretchy Lycra panel at the cuffs makes it easy to get my hands in and out while sealing out the breeze. And a deep chest zip, an insulated hood, and a waist drawcord let me retain or dump heat as needed. The jacket only has one pocket: an oversized, dual-zippered kangaroo pouch. On days when I swapped gloves or peeled a Buff mid-ride, I could stash them without interrupting my ride. I wished this layer had one more pocket to hold my phone separate from everything else, but I like its simplicity too. It comes in XS–XL in fern and blue. I sized up. –BB



ALLY MABRY

## Yum Pouch Dehydrated Meals, \$15

yumpouch.com

► The first thing I noticed when I opened my first Yum Pouch (Rice and Shroomin' Roo Pasta) was the smell. It was like walking into my kitchen after a long day and someone cooking a delicious meal. The next thing I noticed was how identifiable everything was. The broccoli looked like broccoli, and the mushrooms were big slices of mushroom. The package said to cook it for five minutes in a pot or 20 minutes in the food pouch, but while using the pouch, my food hydrated quickly and I was eating sooner

than expected (I'm impatient when I'm hungry). The flavors were delicious, and once I poured it into my camp bowl, I completely forgot I was eating a dehydrated meal. With the white wine sauce and fantastic balance of spices (which you can also buy separately for \$5), this tasted like restaurant-quality food, which made the \$15 price tag (slightly) easier to swallow. The Trail Blazin' Fiesta Rice had similarly high-quality ingredients, and it was a morale-booster to plunge my spork into the bag and emerge with bright red

slices of peppers, hearty slices of zucchini, and a mixture of well-seasoned, well-cooked rice and beans. It was a real meal with next to zero effort, and packaged in a single, biodegradable pouch that packed down small for the ride home. With only two meal options so far, Yum Pouch doesn't offer as wide a selection as other brands, but if these flavors sound of interest to you, and you're looking for a vegetarian or vegan meal as an emergency delicacy, I can say these were a real treat. –Carolyne Whelan





ALLY MABRY

## RightOnTrek Backcountry Meals, \$5/serving

[rightontrek.com](http://rightontrek.com)

► Sometimes after a long ride, we want to feel like we are cooking without actually ... having to cook. RightOnTrek scratches that itch with their semi-assembled meals, packaged in biodegradable bags to help keep trash to a minimum. The Coconut Chicken Curry, for instance, came with a bag of single-serving oil and hot sauce (the curry itself was flavorful but not spicy, so the hot sauce was a welcome addition) attached to the outside of the food pouch, and the chicken was stored separately inside the main pouch. It required being cooked in a pot, rather than in the pouch, so keep that in mind if you're bringing pre-made meals to be ultralight or minimalist. The rice cooked well, and the chicken looked and tasted

just like chicken (according to my lunch buddy; with the chicken packaged separately, we could cook a vegetarian portion separately, which was a nice bonus). It could easily be enhanced with some added vegetables thrown into the pot for the five minutes it took to cook. Also tested was a Hearty Morning Coconut Granola, which was grain-free, meaning it was all chopped nuts instead of oatmeal and didn't get soggy in the hot water I added. It was made with coconut milk but came with a pouch of powdered dairy milk and cream as an additive for those wanting a bit more creaminess. I don't think it needed to be heated up (though it was nice to have a warm crunchy breakfast), which is great for those slow

mornings you just want to heat enough water for coffee and quickly sneak back into your warm tent to read until the frost clears. The Mountain Chili came with an exceptional amount of accoutrements, including a whole cheddar cheese stick. These extras serve to enhance the meals considerably, but also start to weigh down packaging, bulk up the size, and diminish the biodegradability. We all know that sometimes, those sorts of concessions are worth it for a quality, hot meal that doesn't taste rehydrated. These Montana-made meals are also surprisingly affordable, starting around \$5 for a single serving, with a helpful website for choosing the best meals for your dietary and travel needs. —CW

## BruTrek Collapsible Pour Over Coffee Stand, \$45

[planetarydesign.com](http://planetarydesign.com)

▶ Next to a tasty, hearty meal when you get to camp, the most important part of bike touring is brewing a good cup of coffee in the morning. And if you're in no hurry and don't mind a little more cleanup, it's hard to beat a quality pour over. BruTrek's Collapsible Pour Over stand is made from stainless steel, folds flat for easy storage, and comes with a stylish canvas pouch. It also includes two CoffeeSock reusable filters, so you don't need to waste your money on the paper kind. I found the BruTrek easy to set up and easy to use, but most importantly, it makes an excellent cup of coffee. Naturally, your brew will come down to the beans, grind, and amount you use, and in this I came across some confusion, specifically regarding BruTrek's recommended grind. In its online setup guide, BruTrek recommends medium-fine to fine-ground coffee, but the instructions printed on the CoffeeSock box say to use coarse-ground coffee. I asked BruTrek, and they told me to go with the coarse grind. Since the CoffeeSock acts as a pretty fine filter, I think this is the right move. I used the same grind as for my French press at home, and every time I came away with a good, strong cup. The only downside I can see with the BruTrek is that the CoffeeSock filter takes a good amount of water to rinse out, which might be untenable if you're doing a desert trip and can't spare any. However, it's easy enough to fold up the filter with the used grounds still in it and store it in a plastic bag until you get somewhere to clean it. —Dan Meyer



## Specialized/Fjällräven Coolcave

**Panniers, \$80 each**

[specialized.com](http://specialized.com)

▶ The collaboration between Specialized and Swedish outdoor brand Fjällräven has born some pretty unique and useful fruit for bike travel. Take the Coolcave Panniers, for example. In essence, they're not much different from the plastic kitty litter tubs often used for DIY panniers; they're just 19-liter plastic buckets, after all. But aside from costing more and coming in four cool colors, the Coolcaves have a couple of interesting features: one, they employ the KlickFix mounting system, which worked very well on my Tubus Tara rack and operates not unlike what you'll see on an Ortlieb pannier; and two, they're sized and shaped specifically to accommodate a number of other Specialized/Fjällräven accessories, such as the Cave Pack (a backpack that slides into the pannier), the Cave Drybag, and the Cave Tote. Specialized supplied the Cave Totes along with the panniers for this review, and I found them to work very well for both commuting and touring. But part of the beauty of the Coolcaves is that you can use them for whatever you want. On a local bike-ski adventure earlier this year, I shoved my snowboard boots in one pannier — using the included bungee net to keep them in place — and my ski pack in the other, and it all worked like a charm. The Coolcaves even have a hole in the bottom with a removable rubber plug, so I didn't have to worry about snow from my boots melting and sloshing around (also useful if you want to fill the panniers with ice and refreshing beverages). My one complaint about the Coolcave is that the hardware keeping the mounting system in place vibrated loose during an overnight. I only lost one bolt, so the pannier managed to stay on for the ride home, but Specialized doesn't offer replacement hardware. I had to source spares at my local hardware store. My suggestion? Buy some spares at the outset and apply some blue Loctite to the bolt threads if you're concerned. —DM