

## Finding a Fresh Focus

**W**ithout the outdoors, my life would be a blur of deadlines and forgotten chores. When I miss my time in the hills, I become a hazard to myself and those around me as my brain gets so cluttered I can't even function. But a couple days in the High Country, the desert or on the river, and I am right as rain. The concentration that outdoor activity demands is like a dust-buster for the soul. Each powdery turn sucks up a cobweb, every handjam cleans out a crack and all the sweat gets the machine humming along again.

For this therapy to work, the gear I use can't get in the way – especially if it makes me think about how much my feet hurt or how wet and cold I am. Good gear helps you interface with the environment, and inspires you to do more. The best stuff even eases your conscious a bit about impacting the natural world – which is something we all need to focus on.



### Inertia Peak Jacket

My buddy Jeffé took the Inertia Peak Jacket down to Argentina to climb Aconcagua. Before his trip was done, he helped rescue three people, carrying one guy down in his arms. Afterwards, he danced until 5 a.m. with Argentinean beauties in Mendoza. In Santiago, Chile, two bandits drugged his beer, coerced him into giving his PIN, took out a grand at an ATM, but still put him on his flight to Dallas, where he finally came to with a grumpy stewardess shaking him by the lapels after everyone else had deplaned. I waited patiently for him to tell me all this, and finally said, “Yeah, yeah, sounds neat, but what about the jacket?” He said it was a perfect outer layer for sun, wind, and wicking sweat. It looked sharp enough to wear on the scene in Mendoza and comfortable enough for a 10-hour blackout in an airline seat. Considering he is still alive, I reckon the Inertia Peak also comes with a little magic. (\$150); [www.cloudveil.com](http://www.cloudveil.com).



### Micro-Spikes

Kahtoola's total focus is traveling on ice and snow. With the Micro-Spikes, they have created a lightweight crampon that sharpens that focus for any shoe. I originally got these mid-winter and thought I might impress my uncle Ronnie if I tromped out to the ice-fishing shack in my spikes with a fresh case of Old Style. But I was too busy skiing this winter's copious snow to give them a real test. This spring, the easily donned spikes have come into their own, running and hiking on snow-packed and icy trails when snowshoes are no longer appropriate. They kept my stride normal even on slippery ground, making them a great early season training tool. They are also light enough to drop in the pack for lingering snow at the base of a rock climb or backpacking route. (\$59); [www.kahtoola.com](http://www.kahtoola.com)

### Skinny Fish Sleeping Bag

Big Agnes, out of Steamboat Springs, Colorado, decided to take their tried and true designs and re-focus on sustainability with the Skinny Fish and Diversion. The deal with the Big Agnes sleeping system is that the sleeping pad slips securely into the bag, integrating the two. What does that mean to you? First, you can't roll off the pad and wake up shivering on the cold hard ground. Second, the system reduces overall

bulk and weight by eliminating insulation that your body would only crush and render useless. Now the big news about the Skinny Fish and Diversion pad is that they create a combo made from nearly 100% recycled material including Climashield HL Green insulation. Luxuriously roomy, but still high-performance, this little eco-friendly duo will help you sleep soundly. (\$179.95, \$89.95); [www.bigagnes.com](http://www.bigagnes.com).



### Gorillapod

The Gorillapod from Joby will literally help you keep things in focus. This ultra-cool little unit acts as a portable, stowable tripod, and can secure a heavy camera to just about anything it can get its strong arms around: branches, signposts, your cat. Also, the contraption is incredibly easy to level on uneven terrain. This medium-sized unit is only 5.8 ounces but holds firm even with a full-sized SLR attached. The cool thing is that once you get into it, you won't be able to stop finding strange places to set this thing up for group photos and self portraits ... “Okay, Fido, hold still while you take a picture of Daddy.” (\$44.95) [www.joby.com](http://www.joby.com).

### Revel Jacket

Spring is the time when the lovely snow we couldn't get enough of all winter turns to an insidious liquid. Great if you want to go kayaking, but kinda lame if you want to stay dry on a backpacking trip. For me, the holy grail of gear is the perfect waterproof jacket: not too steamy, heavy or leaky, but just right. The Revel from Outdoor Research may just be the one. This little bit of manna is lightweight, has full ventilation options and waterproof/windproof breathable fabric. Unlined and streamlined, the Revel is the perfect stowaway for when unexpected weather blows in. It immediately replaced a bulkier jacket I have been using for years as the go-to in my climbing pack. (\$150); [www.outdoorresearch.com](http://www.outdoorresearch.com).



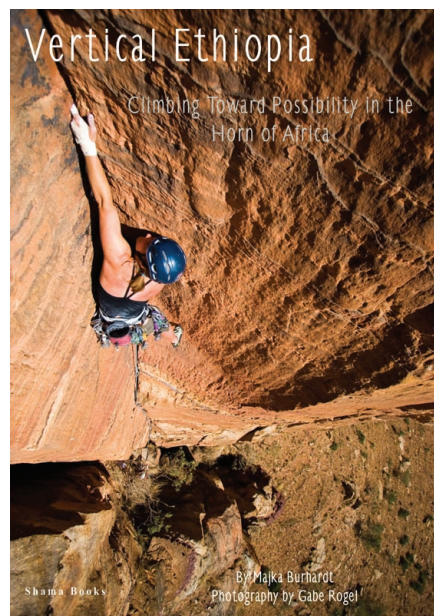


## Slipstream

Talk about needing to focus, I spaced my Ryder Slipstreams at the pool three days after I got them. I have eventually lost every pair of shades I have ever owned. But three days is a little short even for me, especially because I thought they were to-



tally sweet. All the Ryder designs feature good, lightweight technology specifically designed for activity. I particularly liked how easy it was to adjust and fit the sticky rubber on the nose and temple. They stayed on my noggin even while hucking a gainer off the diving board. Great performance for less coin is what makes these shades stand out. (\$39.99); [www.ryderseyewear.com](http://www.ryderseyewear.com).



## Vertical Ethiopia

The story on the pages of *Vertical Ethiopia* encompasses a bold endeavor taken by four climbers and their photographer to explore an often misrepresented country. In the introduction, author Majka Burhardt admits to formerly having a skewed view of Ethiopia as a country of strife and famine. I found I held similar stereotypes as I remembered images from 1980s television of malnourished children and dry wastelands. Burhardt and her crew of women climbers attempt to correct this view by focusing not only on the natural beauty of the extensive mountains, but on the people and culture as well. While climbing is the narrative vehicle, the theme of the book is the interface between Western and African culture, and the positive outcomes of that interaction. (\$37.99); [www.verticalethiopia.com](http://www.verticalethiopia.com).

## Vodka 14

Lord knows, too much clarity can be a little disconcerting at times. For this affliction, we have booze. But if you are going to smudge your vision a teeny bit, why not do it with the best? Bring in Vodka 14 from Altitude Distillers in Boulder, Colorado. Produced by a father/son team, this premium Vodka is fashioned from certified organic grain with a level of care that only a small distiller can pull off. The result is simply the best vodka I have ever tasted. I assembled a group of lucky friends, some connoisseurs, some not, to taste Vodka 14 against another top-shelf brand, and there wasn't a tongue in the house that didn't wag on about how smooth and clean the Vodka 14 tastes by comparison. The main difference for me was the smooth finish, maybe too smooth for my own good. And get this, the "14" stands for Fourteener. A pretty cool homage to our beloved Rockies. (\$32 for 750 ml); [www.vodka14.com](http://www.vodka14.com).



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