

The New York Times

E8

THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2009

Physical Culture

It's Frightful Outside. Let's Walk.

GEAR TEST WITH

Shannon Bailey,
Advocate for Walking

THERE is no shortage of data to support the notion that walking is imminently healthy. Those who engage in this, the simplest of exercise regimens, on a regular basis may well be helping themselves avoid obesity, diabetes, depression.

But keeping up with such simple bodily maintenance isn't quite so manageable when the mercury drops. Snow, wind and ice can railroad many otherwise active and ambulatory striders for an entire season. Those who might normally stroll around the block a few times a week while chatting with friends simply jettison exercise altogether; urban commuters adamant about walking to work for the sake of fitness will all too often dash into the heat-blasting refuge of the nearest bus or taxi. It is the time of year that many Americans experience their greatest weight gain.

But makers of highly technical coats — those suitable for high summits or deep-powder traverses reachable only by helicopter — also sell a breed of coat that falls at the other end of the exercise spectrum. Shannon Bailey, who works for the Dakota County Public Health Department in Minnesota (it sponsors a program called Simple Steps, which promotes walking as a way to stay healthy), tried this kind of coat on a five-mile walk she usually does in the warmer months. This took her across the St. Paul High Bridge over the frozen Mississippi. Temperatures ranged from 7 to 19 degrees. These warm coats left her feeling empowered by the thought of ditching the treadmill for the occasional blizzard stroll.

Her favorites were made by EMS, the North Face, and Arc'Teryx. She liked them because they were lightweight but kept her warm. "The winters are brutal here," said Ms. Bailey, right, in the North Face. "They are six months long. It really doesn't warm up until after Memorial Day." CHRISTOPHER PERCY COLLIER



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CAROLINE YANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

1. EMS ARCTIC PARKA www.tgosports.com, \$114.50. "This one was unexpectedly warm," Ms. Bailey said. She found the coat the least bulky of the group. It was less restrictive while walking despite being longer than the Arc'Teryx, she noted. She also liked the use of interior cords that cinched the bottom of the coat. "It prevented cold air from rushing in," she said. What's more, she noticed that the fur-lined hood prevented snow from hitting her face.

2. ARC'TERYX KAPPA SV HOODY www.altrec.com, \$449.95. "This coat was very lightweight," Ms. Bailey said. "It was the least bulky, but it kept me really warm." It was also the shortest coat she tried, which made it especially practical for walking. The sleeves had elastic ends that, while reminding her of a child's winter coat, kept the heat her body generated from escaping. This elastic feature worked better than the

snaps on other coats, she observed. Though not fur lined, which was her preference, she liked the hood because it could be pulled tight around her head and neck.



3. CANADA GOOSE EXPEDITION PARKA www.backcountry.com, \$609.95. "You feel a little like a walking snowman while wearing it," she said about this jacket, which she thought was the biggest and bulkiest of the bunch. "If I was stranded in the cold, this is the coat I'd want to be wearing," she said. "It seemed like this coat would keep you warm even in Antarctica." The zipper, she said, was exceptionally large, making it easy to use with gloves. There were elastics around the wrist rather than snaps. "It seems like they took every little thing into consideration," she said.

4. BURTON LTD HEATED DREAM JACKET www.skiingbum.com \$349.95. "I saved this coat for the worst weather," Ms. Bailey said. She wore this coat (which has an internal rechargeable heater that reminded her of an electric blanket) on a snowy 7-degree day. "My

daughter said, "Wow, Mom, that's a really cool coat," she recalled. But Ms. Bailey found that it wasn't the warmest coat for walking and thought that perhaps it would be better for a more highly aerobic activity like snowboarding. She recalled thinking, "I hope it heats up soon," after putting it on the warmest temperature setting while on her usual walk.

5. THE NORTH FACE ARCTIC PARKA www.trails.com \$298.95. "It didn't hinder my stride," Ms. Bailey said of the North Face coat, which reached the top of her knees (making it the longest coat she tested). "I loved that it kept my legs warm," she said. It was so warm, in fact, that she reported sweating more than usual. The wire around the hood permitted her to flip the hood back or forward depending on the wind.