

Buffalo sp6s Review



Okay, I admit I'm a total gearfreak. Mainly that means I like searching for new gear almost as much as the stuff I do to put that gear to test. I'm always looking for the gear that can help me go the extra mile. In this quest, traditional waterproof/breathable clothing, best known under brand name Gore-Tex never made me very happy. It's waterproof, but however good those garments may breathe in the laboratory, I eventually wet out from the inside. It seems like I'm not alone there, some influential outdoor enthusiasts like [Andrew Skurka](#) and [Andy Kirkpatrick](#) tend to have the same experience. Breathable or not, I don't like to get wet, or should I say cold from wetness.

Waterproof/breathable membranes get me wet and cold. In return I've been wearing softshell allover (the non-membrane softshells of course. Any membrane will block sweat to get out), and some super-breathable Norwegian mesh baselayers such as Brynje and Aclima have been living up quite closely to my expectations. I stay warm, and sweat moves out without cooling me down. But in badass rain, I would still need a waterproof layer.

In my ongoing search for the ultimate outdoor clothing piece, I stumbled over some hyper-enthusiastic [reviews](#) about Buffalo Systems. That was worth a shot!

It took me a long time to get my hands on one. For a Buffalo to work, the size has to be perfect. For me this means I have to custom-order one with longer sleeves. Waiting times at Buffalo can be very long, because they are tiny factory that still makes all products down in Sheffield, UK. In the end I bought an easier to find NATO-green one that was in stock, even though I honestly don't like the colour that much. Well, Buffalo is all function, not fashion.



SP6s. Note that I've modified a few details myself and that I stitched an Icelandic flag on mine ;-)

How it works, well simply put it's made to move water away from your body. All water. Sweat plus rain. The system is based on how animal fur works: Animals have two layers of fur: long and stiff hairs, and fluffy short hairs. The long hairs bead off the worst rain, and the fluffy hairs trap heat and move water into the long hairs. Ever seen a totally wet-out, cold animal? Me neither. Buffalo uses Pile to mimic the effect of the short fur hairs, and Pertex nylon to mimic the longer hairs.

Pile is best described as prehistoric fleece. It's been around for a long time, however it kind of disappeared with the invention of fleece. However, pile has some really great features: It breathes extremely well, and the hairs absorb water. This means any water or sweat gets pulled away from the skin, and transferred to the next layer. This movement of water is the quintessence of Buffalo's comfort game. It doesn't look as fancy as fleece, but Fleece doesn't cut it for what Buffalo needed. Also, Fleece didn't exist yet when Buffalo was first released.

Pertex could well be one of the most underestimated materials in the outdoor industry. It's a very densely woven nylon, windproof (some versions more than others), downproof (however that's not essential for our Special Six) and has a strong capillary effect. It will spread any drop of water over a big surface so it can dry out faster.

Together the pile and pertex will work as a do-it-all winter piece of clothing. If it rains, you will get wet, but the materials will move any water away and therefore you will stay warm and comfortable. It sounds crazy but it's true! Design wise, nothing really has changed from the first-ever model from

1978. Straight lines and a relatively simple pattern. And it's a smock! Since it's designed to wear on the bare skin, a smock will make it feel much more like a shirt than a full zip jacket would do.

Check out [this](#) video about Montane's copy of our Beloved buffalo for more information!

So, let's put this thing to a test! My first experiences with the SP6s were in Snowdonia, where we had 4 days of consistent heavy rain and wind. Team waterproof went home after two soaked nights, but team Buffalo was still comfortable and decided to summit mt. Snowdon for the second time. We took the Watkin path, a long climb over a ridge. Low visibility, the necessary bottlenecks, heavy rain and wind gusts up to 130 km/h. The little streams that otherwise would not exist or at least run down calmly, were blown up again by the wind. Nothing could possibly keep anybody dry, especially not a Buffalo (which is not meant for it), so we were wet, wet, wet. And comfortable. We had been nice and comfortable in our Buffalo's straight from the beginning. Take that, waterproof!



'Wet' would have been an understatement.

Having fallen in love with the Buffalo Performance, I took mine pretty much everywhere. Belgian winters tend to be cold and wet. The kind of 2°C and rain winter, where the risk of hypothermia is actually the highest, but Buffalo didn't let me down and kept me warm and comfortable. Hurray for Buffalo!

For a wintertrekking in magnificent Iceland, Buffalo was the first choice as well. The first two days, we had great weather, actually a tad too warm for my SP6s, but the ventilation is very effective, once both side zips and the front zip are opened. Yet, If there is anything that could be improved about the SP6s design, then I would make the front zip a little longer and put napoleon pockets on both sides of it, instead of the shorter zip and a kangaroo pocket. On the next day, weather turned gloomy, moist and windy. Exactly the conditions where a buffalo feels best in, and where I thought I could easily take quite a bit more. Bring it on!

Another moment of truth was during our last night in Iceland, where we camped next to a hot spring where we could bathe in. I hadn't chosen the best spot to leave my clothes, and the combination of wet snow and Icelandic hot spring steam had gotten my shirt quite wet. As I was counting on my Buffalo to get me dry after the bath, I felt a little insecure when putting it back on, but that insecurity evaporated straight away once the shirt was on. Seconds later I was nice and dry. The Pile literally sucks away moist from my skin, and given a little body heat, the tips of the pile hairs dry instantly. Back in the tent I crammed the wet SP6s in a drybag and used it as a pillow for the night (The Buffalo SP6s isn't really the lightest or most compact piece of gear, but it is very soft!). I slept like a baby. Having laid on a cold surface for a whole night, the SP6s wasn't exactly the nicest to unpack in the morning. But that's the thing with Buffalo: However wet it is, it will perform. So putting it on that morning was 10 seconds of "yuck" and then hours of "yay". It works.



In extreme conditions you can wear two Buffalo's on top of each other. Here: SP6s as 'Baselayer' and a Buffalo Belay (Same Pertex and Pile) with Expedition hood on top of it. Double dutch performance! Or just use the belay jacket as a belay jacket of course

Wrap up: No, it's not beautiful. Yes, it looks as if it came straight from the 1970'ies No, it's not waterproof. Yes, it has limitations (Mainly: too warm or too cold, but hey, there is more Buffalo to play with! They have thicker and thinner stuff too!). And most of all: Yes it works. It's a go-to piece that you can throw in the corner of a tent to pick up where you left off the day before. However wet it gets, it will work and keep working. However bad the weather gets, The SP6s will only feel more at home. Ditch your fancy baselayer, midlayer and expensive hardshell and put on nothing but a vintage looking smock. This thing will easily make me go the extra mile (remember Snowdonia...) and I will perform the shit out of it. I am secure that, at some point, the SP6s will outperform me, and that's when it will save my life.



A Buffalo and a mountain summit. What else could you wish for?