

## McHale UnLtd Super-SARC +1

\$1,100 | [www.mchalepacks.com](http://www.mchalepacks.com) | ★★★★★

**MCHALE PACKS AREN'T** off-the-shelf clones. Each one is custom made in nearly unlimited options including your choice of fabrics, colors, top or panel loading, frame type and pockets. Folks with extra-short or long torsos can get a perfect fit. Such personal care and craftsmanship isn't cheap, but McHales's packs do start at an affordable \$359. All are guaranteed and McHale says he gets zero returns.

The model I tested was made of bulletproof Dyneema and listed at 5,000 cubic inches (but holds 6,000 compared to other packs), and weighs 3 pounds 3 ounces without pockets and the back vent panel (the same pack sells for \$595 in non-Dyneema). The top six inches of an internal bayonet frame are removable, converting the pack from expedition mode to a shorter, more technical type. Remove the entire frame, hip belt and top lid and you have a super-light summit pack. Two 7075-T6 aluminum stays keep the weight distributed and come in seven different thicknesses depending on whether you want an ultra-lightweight pack or a burly expedition model. To keep the pack snug to your back, McHale uses a patented "Bypass" shoulder-strap system that allows the padding to float on the strap, with independent adjustments at the top and bottom. The system lets you slack off the shoulder straps without having the pack tip backwards from the top.

The SARC hip belt is softer and thinner than most, and has two buckles. The belt supports your load, moves with you and doesn't slip. If you've ever suffered bruised and sore hips from a rigid belt or had a heavy pack slide down your hips, weighting your shoulders, you'll appreciate the comfort and support. The downside is that the double-buckle is more difficult to operate when you are wearing gloves.

Compared to other packs, the SARC wasn't just more comfortable, but made a 55-pound load feel more like 35. Bottom line, this is the strongest, lightest, most comfortable and versatile pack I've tested or owned. It is large and strong enough for expedi-

- ▶ Custom pack.
- ▶ Great weight-to-capacity ratio.
- ▶ Unique soft hip belt.
- ▶ Suspension makes load feel lighter than in other packs.
- ▶ Strip-away components lets one pack do it all.

tions and light enough for alpine-style ascents. If you want one pack to cover all of your mountaineering needs, the SARC is a superb choice.

—Larry Amkraut

## Marmot Amphibian Glove

[www.marmot.com](http://www.marmot.com) | \$70 | ★★★★★

**ANYONE WHO'S SUFFERED** through the "screaming barbies" knows how hard it is to find a good mixed-climbing glove. The Marmot Amphibian—designed by all-around climber Pete Take-da—may not prevent the painful numbing of frozen fingers, but its features definitely address the needs of the modern mixed climber.

What's unique about the Amphibian is the use of sticky Vibram rubber on the fingertips and on the back of the hand for times on mixed routes when you hand jam or grab rock edges. The rubber is useful sometimes, but it rarely detracts. The rubber fingertips are stiff and awkward at first, but work better when broken in.

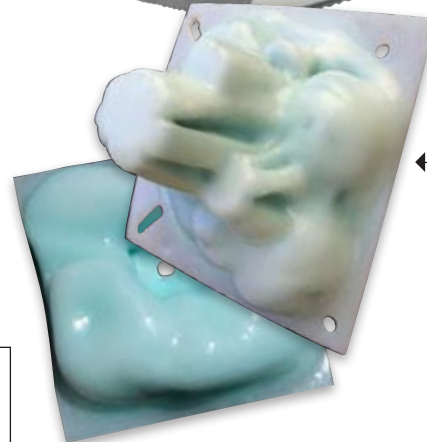
In leashless M-climbing, your grip is the only thing you've got. The best feature of the Amphibian is the material used in the palm, something called Pittards Oil Tec Atomic Goatskin, which

- ▶ Sizes: XS—XL
- ▶ Windstopper adds protection and some warmth to a light glove.
- ▶ Vibram rubber on the fingertips and backs of the hand helps in certain situations, but sometimes detracts.
- ▶ Velcro wrist strap keeps glove snug.
- ▶ Pittards Oil Tec Atomic Goatskin used for glove's palm—highly sticky, water-resistant material yields a secure grip on leashless tools.

adds a lot of dexterity and grip power, especially when the glove is wet.

My favorite feature is one you can't see: The entire glove is lined with Windstopper, adding warmth to the glove without the bulk. A Velcro wrist strap keeps the glove from slipping.

—Andrew Bisharat



## Sierra Designs DriZone Down Booties

[www.sierradesigns.com](http://www.sierradesigns.com) | \$69.95 | ★★★★★

**DOWN BOOTIES (DB) ARE** the most essential, and underappreciated, item of climbing gear on today's market.

DBs can be used for objectives large and small. On cold days at the boulders, I don DBs in between burns with my climbing shoes still on. My piggies stay warmer and retain sensitivity, which means I am less likely to slip.

On a nine-pitch free climb, my partner and I brought up one belay parka and one pair of down booties. Sliding into the feathery goodness during the hanging belays was awesome.

Recently, while camping, I actually couldn't sleep because I was so pumped for morning to come so I could throw on some DBs and fire up the espresso!

For those into the "fruit boot" scene of mixed climbing, bringing DBs means you can hike to the crag in your integrated crampon shoes, but once you are there, put on DBs for belaying/chilling between burns.

Sierra Designs makes fine booty in general, but the DBs I recommend for climbers are the DriZone Down Booties. The down is encased in waterproof/breathable ripstop nylon, which offers excel-

lent protection against cold wetness. A durable EVA sole provides a bit of traction, and the seams are taped. DBs are clumsy to walk around in at first, but you will learn ... and you will love it.

—AB

- ▶ Sizes: Men's and women's sizes, S—XL.
- ▶ Weight: 13 ounces (M).
- ▶ Colors: Black, Paprika, Biscayne (women's)
- ▶ Outer shell: Drizone, a two-layer waterproof/breathable shell.
- ▶ 700-fill goose down.
- ▶ EVA foot bed for comfort.
- ▶ Recommended uses: For cold belays on long free routes; winter bouldering; ice/mixed cragging; winter camping.

## Ice Holdz

From \$15/hold | features start at \$48  
★★★★★ | [www.iceholdz.com](http://www.iceholdz.com)

**CLIMBING EARLY-SEASON** ice is always a humbling experience. Despite dry tooling up blocks on my home woodie, I find the first ice climb of the year wakes my hibernating tool-swinging arms. This year will be different because I've been training on a set of Off-Belay's new Ice Holdz, bolt-mountable faux-ice features that climb surprisingly like the real thing.

Most indoor ice features are made of dense foam or are actual ice in a refrigerated gym. Ice Holdz, however, are manufactured from a rubbery compound with a plastic shell. Think chocolate-covered nougat and you get the idea. I was astounded to find that even a 1/4-inch stick held me on overhanging terrain. The feel of the ice is realistic, and your tools clean easily.

Ice Holdz come in many shapes and sizes, from small, square "Splat" to monster 22-inch-long textured sheets you can peck your way up. My favorite hold was a hanging dagger that I mounted to my gym's roof. Held by two bolts, you can actually figure-4 on this plastic gob!

Ice Holdz wear out, but not very quickly. Each hold can rotate when one side gets mangled, and when the entire thing is shot you can pop out the backing and simply replace the shell. Off-Belay recycles all products, so even though their business is indoor climbing, they respect the cold winters we need to keep the real ice forming outside.

—Brian Irwin

- ▶ Artificial ice holds made from a rubbery compound covered with a plastic shell.
- ▶ Realistic performance for ice tools.
- ▶ Bolts onto any standard woodie.
- ▶ 4 icicle shapes.
- ▶ 4 large features.
- ▶ Inside "rubber" is replaceable.