Brenig - fitting the outdoors

In the area of the United Kingdom known as North Wales the inhabitants, for the most part, are descended from those Britons pushed into a mountainous corner by the advancing Romans in 54 BC. They're a tough and hardy nation, uncompromising in attitude, wonderful friends, bad enemies and responsible workers. They have a simple philosophy born out of adversity that says the best is barely good enough.

If one draws a line south from the town of Abergele on the North Wales coast and another eastward from Betws y Coed, where they intersect is the Llyn Brenig reservoir. The area is a site of ancient ceremonial burials and the cairns that mark them. The highest point is a mere 1,703m above sea level, but on a wild day the wind will strip your bones and the rain will go straight through. Graham Ogle chose the name Brenig when he established his clothing company in the nearby town of Holywell – possibly to epitomise the protection standards for its output.

Working strictly on a direct sales basis, Brenig's contribution to the North Welsh culture is supported by its use of fabrics that would cause a shudder to run through some of the designers working for bigger names on the international scene. Eight-ounce neoprene coated nylon, sliver knit fibre pile, double layers of windproof polycottons, and three-ply breathable polyester laminates make up the bulk of the output. As Ogle says: "We make clothes for people who have to work for a living." And before you bridle at that – he meant people who work out-of-doors.



Alex Bligh of the Halo Trust used the trek to the South Pole as a high profile fund raising exercise.

Brenig

Specialised product

In truth the outdoor work clothing aspect is only a part of the output from this tiny manufactory. The company classifies itself as a specialised manufacturer of high performance outdoor wear, and offers an extensive product range covering sailing, corporate wear and country clothing.

In addition to the heavy-hitting fabrics, the company specifies Pertex nylons from Perseverance Mills and Aquatex breathables from Porvair International. Policy dictates that the company is gently moving towards custom textiles to meet the requirements of the it's more specialised customers.



What is meant by specialised? Well, for a series of examples we should take a look at Brenig's record of involvement for the past year.

Four explorers, Rosie Stancer, Pen Hadow, Simon Murray, and Alex Bligh have all completed the South Polar trek wearing high-performance clothing designed and manufactured by Graham Ogle and his team. Another intrepid, Ben Saunders, 26, has just completed the lone and unsupported 1,240-mile journey across the Arctic Ocean, claiming a world first despite some interesting 'adventures' with Russian bureaucracy before he'd even started.

To give an idea of the physical parameters involved, it was pointed out that Rosie Stancer is petite and weighs just over 100 pounds wringing wet. Alex Bligh, who made the incredible journey in aid of the Halo Trust, is 6ft 5ins (196cm) and weighs 250 pounds (113kg). Incidentally, Rosie made her solo trip in just 43 days and 20 hours.

Hadow's polar trek trip was his second in two years. In 2003 he became the first to complete the unsupported walk to the North Pole. Brenig-designed clothing enabled him to survive an immersion in Arctic water and a lengthy wait for retrieval because of poor weather conditions. Murray's Antarctic trek, in company with Hadow, established him as the oldest person to complete the feat.

Being dry is relative

Long-distance sailing is another venture for the company and Brenig has provided specialist garments and equipment for sailing triumphs, including on-deck sleeping bags for three yachts in the last two Global Yacht Races. Developed in 2-layer breathable fabric, these pieces of equipment ensure a modicum of comfort where none would otherwise exist, although - as was said - nothing can stay dry under the deluge of a couple of tons of sea water.

Nearer to home Brenig supplies outdoor wear for countryside rangers, outdoor training centres and even shepherds. One client is Emrys Lewis who ultrasonically scans up to 30,000 pregnant sheep a season. Another, Gareth Jones, recently sent his jacket back for 'refurbishment' after he had scanned 400,000 sheep over an 18-month period.

The involvement with outdoor centres includes equipment for both staff and trainees. Accessories include a series of rucksacs which reminded me of the original Karrimor Outward Bound sac, although in Brenig's case the fabric is 1000d nylon and the harness is padded, but you can still turn it inside out and hose off the jam when the sandwiches leak.

There's a double-layer polyester climbing smock, the ubiquitous 8-ounce neoprene waterproof and a series of proofed nylon shelters capable of supporting anything from two to twelve people. And an old favourite – the 'woolly bear' pile suit for ultimate comfort.

Graham Ogle's vision for his company is one of steady growth, total involvement with the needs of his customers – specialised or otherwise – and a cautious acceptance of advanced technology once 'they've proved it to work in real life'.