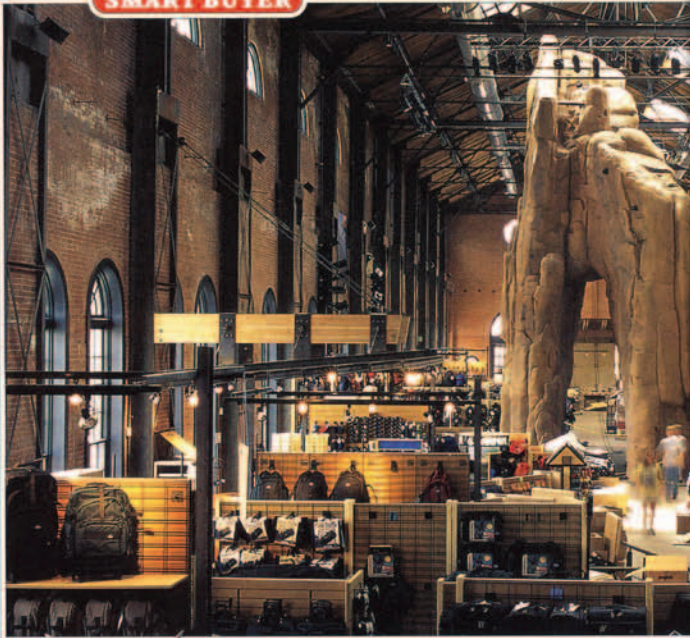


**SMART BUYER**



## 2 ROCK/CREEK OUTFITTERS CHATTANOOGA, TN

A regional hub for paddlers with outlets on the Tennessee and the Ocoee rivers, Rock/Creek stocks more than 200 boats, organizes weekend trips, and lets experienced paddlers demo whitewater boats on the Ocoee's Class III+ rapids.

(rockcreek.com)

# 25 Best Outdoor Stores

Where to find the top adventure gear, the smartest advice, and the best prices



**NEPTUNE MOUNTAINEERING | BOULDER, CO** Only lightweight high-performance gear, such as the MSR SuperFly stove, make

**E**VER SINCE LEWIS AND CLARK STOPPED IN Philadelphia to load up on catgut mosquito nets, linen knapsacks, and patent medicines for their expedition, all great American adventures have started with a shopping spree. Hitting an outdoor store for maps, gear, and advice is an essential rite of passage, so finding the right store matters. We enlisted more than 100 experts — athletes, guides, writers, and more — and

staff expertise, location, contribution to the local adventure scene, and product quality. Staffers from virtual stores picked the best gear for us to showcase. And some of the stores turned out to be adventure destinations themselves, like REI's 96,000-square-foot Denver complex, with its 45-foot indoor climbing tower (pictured above). But all the great stores supply much more than just gear — they supply inspiration. We had

out of every one. —GREG MELVILLE



**FREELINE DESIGN | SANTA CRUZ, CA** Freeline always has the latest surf gear, such as Quiksilver's stretch neoprene Cell. (\$250)

**Men's Journal Breakthrough Award**

(from \$550)

**RIBBON FLIES | WEST YELLOWSTONE, MT** Ribbons, the owner, first copied classic back in the early '80s. (\$2)

**BLUE RIBBON FLIES | WEST YELLOWSTONE, MT** Designer Tom Morgan makes only 30 of these bamboo gems. Ribbon is one of the few places they can be ordered. (\$3,850)

**THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO HAWAII**  
THE BEST BEACHES, PARTIES, SURFING, AND KAYAKING IN THE WORLD  
THE GHOST OF THE HIMALAYAS, P. 48

# Men's Journal

Let us take the interesting life  
**Your Own Piece of PARADISE**

**FIND IT!**  
25 Perfect Beaches & Great Island Adventures

**OWN IT!**  
43 Tropical Dream Homes You Can Buy Now

**LIVE IT!**

**Jimmy Buffett**  
The Original Pirate of the Caribbean

Best Adventure Gear in America

**PLUS**  
The Michael Phelps Fitness Program  
A Life-Changing New Workout

### Virtual Stores

**HIGH-END Backcountry.com** With the widest range of premium gear available — like the Suunto Titanium X6HRT (\$1,000), below — and superb customer service (phones are manned by Utah gearheads), Backcountry.com is the go-to site for serious adventurers.

**DEALS Sierratradingpost.com** A T.J. Maxx for gear, this website sells off-season apparel and overstocks. Hidden amid the no-name brands and closeouts are top-drawer items as much as 70 percent off retail.

right brands to satisfy fussy (paragonsports.com)

### CYCLING

**RAIN BIKE LISTS | DURANGO, CO** Epicenter of mountain year-old shop's walls tell the with memorabilia donated pions. But what sets it apart the staff. "The mechanics e found anywhere," says top U.S. finisher at the Bike World Championships. specialists.com)

**CAN CYCLERY | SAN FRANCISCO, CA** The store specializes in rare Italian-regenerated brands such as Colli, as well as handmade from Gunnar and Waterford, house brand, Soma, is even

ycling celebrity Robin (cycling.com) SHOP

region's strongest shop sells and services everything from \$220 Treks to \$8,000 Litespeeds. (westhillshop.com)

### PADDLING

**1 NANTAHALA OUTDOOR CENTER | BRYSON CITY, NC** No shop has a more convenient put-in spot (on the Nantahala's Class II+ rapids) for testing boats or newer equipment (manufacturers are in a hurry to get their boats into the hands of the hardcore trendsetters who shop at NOC). The salespeople know their stuff because many of them are guides or competitive paddlers. Prime time to visit: Halloween weekend, when NOC sells off all of its instructional gear from the previous

**2 ROCK/CREEK OUTFITTERS | CHATTANOOGA, TN** A regional hub for paddlers with outlets on the Tennessee and the Ocoee rivers, Rock/Creek stocks more than 200 boats,

### Best Catalogs



**1) COLORADO CYCLIST** Found in every serious cyclist's mailbox, this catalog has it all: the best road bikes, apparel, and accessories — at the best prices. (coloradocyclist.com)

- 2) MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT CO-OP** MEC is to Canada what REI is to America: It sells a huge range of top quality gear at amazingly low prices. (mec.ca)
- 3) NORTHWEST RIVER SUPPLY** NRS carries absolutely everything needed for paddling, including its own line of affordable high-quality gear. (nrsweb.com)
- 4) SWELL** No surfboards here, but plenty of wetsuits, surf gear, beachwear, beach accessories, and surf videos at prices often 30 percent lower than you'll find at your local shop. (swell.com)
- 5) BASS PRO** The 700-page everything-you-need "Master Catalog" weighs as much as a tackle box and is so good Bass Pro needs 100 customer service reps to field all the phone orders. (basspro.com)