



Eric and Matthew Gilbertson have set out to measure and discover new high points in countries around the world  
 NICK ROY

WORLD NEWS

# Twin peaks: brothers Matthew and Eric Gilbertson rewrite mountain record books

Keiran Southern, Los Angeles

Wednesday November 02 2022, 5.15pm GMT, The Times

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Nestled among sprawling juniper forests where eagles soar overhead, the Jabal Sawda peak has long been one of Saudi Arabia's crown jewels for mountaineers.

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dethroned it in 2018, finding it was shy by about three metres compared with the Jabal Ferwa summit.

For more than a decade, the 36-year-old scientists have set out to discover new high points in countries around the world, rewriting the record books in places across the Middle East and west Africa.



The brothers' love of the mountains began with family trips in the US

They have so far reached the summit of more than 100 mountains and have identified new high points in Togo, Guinea-Bissau and Ivory Coast.

Matthew, a research scientist at Lockheed Martin in Palo Alto, California, and Eric, an instructor in mechanical engineering at Seattle University, say their work is motivated by both a need for accuracy and a love of mountaineering.

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“If we’re going to go through all the effort to visit a country and visit the highest mountain, we want to be sure that we have indeed visited the highest mountain,” Matthew said.

“But I guess we also consider it a service to future mountaineers to have an accurate survey done so that they can focus their efforts on getting to whichever peak they want to get to.”

The brothers’ love of mountaineering began when they were children with family trips to the Great Smoky Mountains in the southeastern United States.

While they were students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) they began “peakbagging”, or climbing as many mountains as possible. After completing their goal of reaching the high point of each US state in 2012, they turned their attention to the rest of the world.

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Due to uncertainty over what constituted the peak in some countries, the twins began measuring the mountains themselves.

“In some countries, they may not have the resources or have the

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weigh about 25lb (11kg) and the brothers have to haul them up the mountain to measure the peaks.

The other tool is a sophisticated GPS unit. In west Africa Eric used a device that has to be placed on the peak for about an hour while it receives data from passing satellites to deliver a measurement accurate to within centimetres.

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The brothers believe there may be five to ten countries where the highest point is yet to be correctly identified, including Myanmar and Colombia as well as islands in the Pacific.

Hauling heavy technical equipment into the high mountains, the pair can often attract unwanted attention. When measuring the peak of Mount Agou in Togo, Eric was spotted by soldiers from a nearby military installation who ordered him to leave.

He was again confronted by armed men in Guinea-Bissau as he measured Mount Ronde, the country's highest peak at just under 304m, but managed to get out of trouble by paying a bribe of about \$45.

"We had to negotiate with them for a while," Eric said.  
"Eventually we paid them off and they let us drive away. It was a little bit scary."

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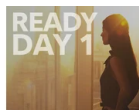
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## Eric Gilbertson



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**Suzy Romita** • 8 HOURS AGO

Interesting article and good luck to these two with their surveying. I remember the news in the eighties when K2 was (mistakenly) found to be taller than Everest. Somewhat confusingly (until you read the history) K1 is the 22nd highest mountain in the world, whereas its neighbour K2 is the second highest! *(Edited)*

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**Tom Bloomfield** • 8 HOURS AGO

Does that mean that K9 is a very tall dog?

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**Wensum** • 4 HOURS AGO

Good on them. Interestingly no the world applauds these bribes for adventure that result in prison if in a corporate space for no less daring an adventure.

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**Lady Dorin** • 5 HOURS AGO

They haul a theodolite up the mountain to measure the height. Why? A theodolite measures vertical and horizontal angles and there is little point in having it on the top of the mountain for heighting. A theodolite is like a protractor. This is like comparing a soap box cart to a F1 racing car. The datum is critical. Historically mean sea level was used now with GPS the World Geodetic System is used measuring from the centre of the earth. For height it is measured on an ellipsoid. Full marks for their adventurous endeavours but if they survey as per the article there must be doubt there must be doubt as to the accuracy of the results.

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I have a feeling that they took accurate modern measurements but also did old fashioned stuff for the fun of it.

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