

STATUS REPORT – FEBRUARY 2007

Project Statistics

We now have 79 members who have been or are in the process of being tested. Of these, 43 are surname Burns, 22 Byrne, five Byrnes, four Beirne, two O'Byrne, two Breen, and one Brien. But as we all have learned, spelling means little. We seem to be on a plateau, and new membership has tapered off. While it gives me a chance to catch up, we have to maintain momentum if we are ever to fill in the gaps and identify additional clusters.

Ten of our members have joined from the National Geographic Project. Five of these ordered additional tests. The totals are that eight members have been tested for 12 markers only, nine members for 25 markers, 51 for 37 markers, and 11 for 67 markers.

Recruiting New Members

Obviously, we cannot depend on the National Geographic Project for new members. While some who join via it become active participants, 50% so far have not. We have a lot of members as yet unattached to a cluster, and it will only by recruiting others to join that we will ever be able to help them find their roots.

We still do not have any documented Scottish members. A number of us are convinced our roots are there, but lacking a paper trail we cannot be sure. Many Irish immigrants to America found it expedient to claim Scottish origins, there was much cross over from Ireland to Scotland, and there of course were the Scots-Irish.

I recently wrote again to a number of Scottish message boards and researchers. One of them has done well researching the name Burness, which was Robert Burns's original name. He told me that the poet's family was the only one in Scotland that changed to the Burns spelling, so a Burness DNA sample would be of little use to us (the poet had no legitimate sons). He also pointed out that the surname Burns is common in Scotland (1901 census – 8446), and since the name Burns is derived from "burn," meaning small stream, there likely are many different unrelated families. I had thought to go to Scotland myself in the spring to obtain a few Burns samples, but now I don't know.

Several of us have paid to have others tested, which is fine but has its limits. Many projects actively seek "scholarship" funds from their members so that they can offer discounts to potential recruits. We have done a little of this, and perhaps we should do more. Let's think about it.

Analyzing Test Results

There is little I can do or learn from 12 marker results. Some of us have over a hundred matches at that level. While the 12-marker test helps National Geographic trace mass migrations, it is of almost no use in determining family relationships.

I have been using the 25-marker results to make the phylogenetic tree charts, primarily to avoid too many criss-crossing lines connecting us. But the last chart containing 63 members was too complicated. In the future I will have to concentrate on 37-markers and abandon an overall chart in favor of regional associations. Those of you who have not been tested for 37 markers should upgrade so that I can include your data.

As for the eleven of us who have advanced to 67 markers, they are of little use to us at present, but the whole system is advancing toward 100 markers, and they soon will be utilized.

The last group of phylo charts did show several possible new groups emerging. MB and FB are forming a Beirne Cluster (though two other Beirne and not related to them or to each other). BY, LR, and LO seem to forming another one close to, but not part of, the Leinster Cluster.

SNP Testing

Another type of testing is called SNP, or “deep clade” testing. One’s haplogroup can be predicted with some degree of accuracy from the marker test, but to be sure a deep clade SNP test is required. Ireland is something like 78% R1b, a haplogroup that shows that those of us who have it descended from peoples who settled there after the last ice age. But seven of our members are Haplogroup I (I1a and I1c to be specific) that shows they probably descend from Scandinavian Vikings who settled in Ireland 800-1000 AD. Twenty-two of us have been SNP tested with the following results: R1b1c – eleven, R1b1c7 – seven, I1a – three, and I1c – one. R1b1c7 definitely is associated with northwest Ireland and lowland Scotland, while both I1a and I1c are associated with Scandinavia. The most disappointing is the R1b1c results, which tell us nothing except that the testees do not fit into any so far identified subclade and must await discovery of new ones. I can’t recommend deep clade testing for anyone else at this time.

New Software

The administrator of the Williams Project, a software engineer, is working on a software program for administrators. When it is available I will be able to set up a page for each of you, and the program will do a lot of additional analysis. It should be available within a few months.

Books *

Genetic genealogy is not a simple subject, and I doubt there is a single person in this project—including me—who is not confused at times. Even the simplest texts seem complicated and have to be studied rather than just read. The two best and simplest are paperbacks and inexpensive, and I urge everyone to purchase one or the other, read it, and keep it handy as a reference. They are:

Smolenyak, Megan and Ann Turner, Trace Your Roots with DNA, ISBN 1-59486-006-8

Fitzpatrick, Colleen and Andrew Yetser, DNA & Genealogy, ISBN 0—9767160—1-1

The second book is a little easier to understand, but the first listed has a very handy index (lacking in the second).

Other good books that will help you to understand how DNA is being used to trace settlement patterns and migrations are a new book by Spencer Wells called Deep Ancestry: The Geographic Project.; and Bryan Sykes’s Saxons, Vikings, and Celts: The Genetic Roots of Britain and Ireland (Also published in the UK with the name Blood of the Isles). Both are easy reads and very informative. Yet another, which I have yet to read, is Stephen Oppenheimer’s The Origins of the British – A Genetic Detective Story: The Surprising Roots of the English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh.

Paul Burns
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* These books may be purchased through this website – [click here](#)