

SURNAME DNA STUDY – 10th Annual Report

To my shame I see that I have not made an annual report on this Study to the Holly Leaf Chronicle since 2014. So time to catch up!

Much has been happening in the DNA world, not least what must seem to many a bewildering choice of DNA tests that can now be taken. I recommend tests by FTDNA of Houston, Texas, undoubtedly the leader in genetic genealogy testing. Their “Family Finder” autosomal test is appropriate for men or women of any surname seeking close relatives (i.e. up to about 4th cousins). For this membership of the new Irvine Clan Autosomal DNA Project is relevant.

In contrast, the Clan Irwin Surname DNA Study, now over 10 years old, is for those interested in the origins of the surname of Irwin (and its variant spellings), and for those seeking more distant paternal cousins (i.e. over about 4th cousins). For these interests one or more Y-DNA tests may be appropriate; Y-DNA tests can only be taken by males, but women are most welcome to join our Study if they can find a male relative using the Irwin surname (or similar) to take a Y-DNA test.

FTDNA now market several Y-DNA tests. For our surname Study I usually recommend their 37-marker STR test, at \$149. This should tell us from which of the many Irwin genetic families the testee is descended. We now have over 400 y-DNA testees who are descended from one of over 30 different genetic families which use our surname (with various spellings) but which are unrelated to each other within the surname era, i.e. the past millennium (if we go back further we are all eventually related to one another!).

Of these genetic families the largest is the Border Irwins, i.e. Irwins whose paternal ancestors came from the Scottish Borders (typically Dumfriesshire). Two thirds of our Y-DNA testees share this ancestry. For these Border Irwins three further tests are now available: the single L555 SNP test, at \$29, to confirm marginal cases, the BigY test, at \$595, or the new L555 SNP Pack test, at \$119. These latter two tests are enabling us to sub-divide our large Borders genetic family into branches with much more confidence than was possible with STR tests alone, even the 111-marker tests, and to determine the relationships and ages of these branches.

As more relevant DNA tests are taken, so our understanding of the various origins of our surname is steadily improving. As the number of available tests increases so too does the need for care in selecting which test, if any, is the most relevant to each individual’s interests and circumstances, and I am always happy to advise (jamesmirvine@hotmail.co.uk).

Thanks to the curiosity and generosity of many Irwins our surname Study is now one of the 50 largest such projects in the world, our Borders genetic family is probably the largest such family within these projects, and I have been invited to speak on the findings of our Study at genealogy events in the UK, Ireland and even Houston. For more details see www.dnastudy.clanirwin.org.

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