

Using Tree Information Provided by the DNA Companies

By: R. Glenn York

rgyork@rgy.com

Recently the DNA testing companies have introduced tree-based tools to help you understand your DNA test results. The three major testing companies have implemented different approaches different. In addition, some third-party companies have introduced tree-based tools. We will compare these tools and discuss some of the features and weaknesses of each approach.

ANCESTRY

Ancestry introduced “ThruLines™” in early 2019. ThruLines™ uses DNA information along with public trees and searchable private trees to attempt to identify descendants from common ancestors. ThruLines™ provides tiles for each parent, grandparent, and great grandparent back to fifth great grandparents if they can be identified.

If these people are in your tree they will be shown with a solid border and a profile photo if one is in your tree. If the person is not in your tree, but Ancestry computers can identify a “Potential” person for a position, they will display the potential ancestor with a label identifying them as a “Potential Ancestor”. These potential ancestors will also be displayed with a dashed border. If another user has a profile photo for this potential ancestor that photo may be displayed.

Clicking on any of these tiles, will bring up a tree style chart showing the ancestor at the top. The diagram will show descendants that have tested and how they are connected. In many cases the generations will be compressed with an option to expand the intervening generations. These trees will display lines that appear in your tree with solid lines. Often Ancestry will also display lines that the computer has found in other’s trees that appear to fit. These are based on the DNA match and other’s public trees. These branches of the tree will be identified with a dashed border and an “Evaluate” label.

These trees can be useful to identify how some of your DNA matches are related to you. They MUST be evaluated to verify that the lines identified are accurate. In the cases where people are identified as “Potential Ancestor” or “Evaluate” these are hints and should not be accepted as a fact without fully evaluating other evidence and verifying that this branch of the tree and potential ancestor is a valid extension of your family tree research.

These hints can provide valuable clues to help identify directions for future research. In some cases, these hints will prove to be wrong. The branch may be partly valid but be connected in the wrong generation. In some cases, the potential ancestor is not valid and your DNA match to the other person may be through a different ancestor.

ThruLines™ are based on common ancestors and will show multiple suggested descendants of each specific ancestor.

Ancestry does not provide any option to reject a ThruLines™. You maybe able to get some to go away by adding more valid information on your tree, but often other's inaccurate trees will still cause inaccurate ThruLines™ to be reported.

MyHERITAGE

MyHeritage introduced "Theories of Family Relativity" in early 2019. Theories of Family Relativity take an approach of searching through multiple public trees attempting to find a theory of how you may be connected to a DNA match. They may provide multiple theories and multiple paths to show the potential connections.

MyHeritage uses public trees on MyHeritage, Geni, and FamilySearch to develop these theories. Many of the paths will connect multiple public trees provided at different sites. At each transition between trees they will provide a percentage indicating how confident they are that the people in the different trees are the same person. These trees should be considered as clues and fully evaluated. They may be using invalid information from a public tree.

These theories may contain valuable clues that can help you analyze the connections between you and your DNA matches.

Theories of Family Relativity suggests connections between you and a specific DNA match. While it can help identify branches of your family tree it only focuses on one DNA match and does not show others that may be related to the same common ancestor.

MyHeritage has recently added an option to accept or reject a theory of Family Relativity. This is a reversible process where you can reject a theory and if you later discover it was correct you can go back and accept the theory.

23andME

In late 2019, 23andMe introduced their "Family Tree" as a BETA tool. This tool evaluates the DNA shared with a match and considers the various ways that you may be related they attempts to identify the most likely connections between you and the match. These trees are initially populated with a few of your closest matches and will display matches that appear to share common ancestors under blank bubbles in a tree structure suggesting connections.

The "Beta" status has been removed and more options have been provided for you to add information about your family to the blank bubbles. Information added about living people is private and only viewable by you. Information you enter about deceased ancestors may be seen by other users you have elected to connected with.

The 23andMe tree are based on DNA and your input only, so they should not be impacted by incorrect public trees. The disadvantage is that they currently have no way to import so you

must manually enter all data. The tree is only about 3-5 generations so it is not a big project but can take several hours to enter data on all the nodes identified.

Currently these trees may provide some clues, but these trees are not 100% complete. They should be fully evaluated before they are considered as facts.

THIRD-PARTY TREE TOOLS

There are several third-party companies that do not offer DNA testing but provide additional tools to analyze your DNA results. Recently some of these companies have started offering tree-based tools. Most of these third-party companies require payment of additional fees to utilize these tools. Two examples of these third-Party tools are Genetic Affairs and DNA2Tree.

In 2020 law firms working for Ancestry sent “Cease and Desist” letters to many third-party companies requiring them to stop downloading data from Ancestry. This has limited some of from these companies in offering and developing new products based on Ancestry DNA test data.

GENETIC AFFAIRS

Genetic Affairs is a site run by a Dutch genealogist and computer programmer. His site was introduced in late 2018 offering an “Auto Cluster” report where he would pull data from your matches on testing companies’ sites and cluster them to show which matches share common ancestors in a graphic way.

Genetic Affairs uses a subscription model where the user makes a payment to purchase credits. These credits are then used to pay for reports. They offer several different reports that you can purchase and most cost about less than \$1.00 each so for a few dollars a month you can obtain several reports.

In late 2019, they started offering a tree option. The tree option is an add on to the auto cluster report and will try to build a tree branch showing how members of a cluster are related to common ancestors.

Unfortunately, Ancestry’s Cease and Desist letters have stopped Genetic Affairs from working with Ancestry.

Genetic Affairs can provide still tree information for some FamilyTreeDNA matches.

DNA2TREE

DNA2Tree is an app that currently runs on iOS devices only. This site is subscription based. A single month is about \$20.00. Subscription for longer periods of time will be under \$10.00 per month for a year-long subscription.

References:

Ancestry's help file about ThruLines™ is at:

<https://support.ancestry.com/s/article/AncestryDNA-ThruLinesTM> (accessed 9/29/2021)

MyHeritage has a help file explaining how to use Theories of Family Relativity at:

<https://www.myheritage.com/help-center/en/article/how-do-i-use-the-theory-of-family-relativity> (accessed 9/29/2021)

23andMe offers information and a FAQ about the Family Tree tool at:

<https://you.23andme.com/family/tree/info/> (accessed 9/29/2021) (Note: you must be logged into your 23andMe account to access this page)

Kitty Cooper wrote a blog post about DNA2Tree in April 2019.

<https://blog.kittycooper.com/2019/04/dna2tree-build-trees-from-dna-matches/> (accessed 9/29/2021)

Roberta Estes wrote a blog on optimizing your tree on DNA sites to get the matches in Feb

2020. <https://dna-explained.com/2020/02/22/optimizing-your-tree-at-ancestry-for-more-hints-dna-ThruLinesTM/> (accessed 9/29/2021)

Roberta Estes wrote a blog about Genetic Affairs AutoPedigree in May 2020. <https://dna-explained.com/2020/05/24/genetic-affairs-autopedigree-combines-autotree-with-wato-to-identify-your-potential-tree-locations/> (accessed 9/29/2021)