**The 6 Dangerous DNA Myths: Part I**

**Introduction.** Certain DNA myths can set us off in the wrong direction when we are doing our DNA research. Further, we want to understand these myths so we don’t give bad advice to other researchers.

**Myth #1**. If matches do not post their trees, we are stuck, there is no way to work with them.

* This is an especially unfortunate myth because over half of our matches do not post a tree, and we absolutely need a way to get data from those matches.
* Ancestry helps us with good data via the Thru Line feature, but Ancestry only uses data there for people who posted their trees.
* To do a workaround to find data for the non-posters, we need to start by getting as much data as we can for the people who did post their data. Thus, we start by building a database of our top scorers, using Thru Lines, Surname Selection option, and shared matches and matching clusters to build the database.
* Shared matches is the most vital feature of any DNA analysis.
* After an initial database of matches has been built, then work on the non-poster people, looking at their shared matches to see how they compare with our already designated matches. The non-poster people will then be blended into the database, using inferential logic and relying heavily on the shared match data.
* Then, continue the analysis, adding in the next tier of lower scoring people, on down to scores of perhaps cM 20.

**Myth #2**. Ethnicity Estimates are the heart and soul of DNA.

* The different DNA companies market their tests by emphasizing the value of the Ethnicity estimates, and the discussion of ethnicity estimates dominate the usual common talk about DNA results.
* But, our question of the day is whether these estimates are accurate and useful.
* I presented my tree back to the early 1600s showing about 62% going back to Germany and the other 38% to the UK – not a very exciting group.
* I presented the results of 8 different mappings used by 4 different DNA companies. The results showed that the estimates were all over the map. Further, the estimates changed over time, but in the overall, the estimates were terrible, and there was no way to tell which one came anywhere close to the truth.
* Beyond that, even if the results would have been accurate, they would have been of practically no help in doing my own genealogy research.

**Myth #3**. DNA Scores are often weird and unreliable.

* Some people have suggested that the DNA scores vary among the different DNA companies, that sometimes the difference is quite large, and that sometimes the scores give a mixed message.
* Each DNA company uses its own algorithms; nevertheless, the DNA scores all fall within a fairly tight range. Perhaps the several companies may have scores that will vary 10% - 15% from one another, but the scores are still close enough that there is absolutely no problem in determining the level of relationship for each score.
* A special scoring problem occurs with lower scores. In working with lower scores, out to the 5th or 6th generation, many possible cousins simply do not make the cut; that is understandable because the greater number of 5th and 6th cousins will not make the cut – there is nothing wrong with the scores.
* In some cases, there are sizable discrepancies in the scores between different companies. This is usually because Ancestry has an ultra-conservative approach, and uses a “Timber” algorithm that diminishes scores when there is a suspicion of too much endogamy. However, the scores themselves may be accurate.
* Occasionally, a match may show unusual characteristics. An example was presented where a match had shared matches from two different family groups. This can happen, however, and it is not the fault of the scores being problematic.

**Myth #**4. Ancestry DNA has no browser so it is not a good place to do research.

* An alternate question might be: “Which DNA Company is the best to use?
* In reality, each of the 5 major companies are well qualified to perform the basic DNA tasks: find matches, offer scores for each match, and provide shared matches for each match.
* Ideally, it is best to get DNA data from each of the 5 companies.
* Most of us probably want to do one of 3-4 things with our DNA data: validate the data in our paper tree; find any errors in our tree and correct them; extend the tree in certain branch areas; and, for adoptees, find your family. Each company has the basic features to help with those tasks.
* A chart was presented comparing the capabilities of the different companies. Ancestry has a few unique and valuable features, but also has a negative in that it does not offer a browser.
* In terms of the size of its database of potential matches, however, Ancestry is the overwhelming all-star with a huge dominance of total matches. This single feature is so important that it means that Ancestry is by far the most valuable of any company, and should certainly be the place to start one’s research.
* While Ancestry does not offer a browser, we can do practically everything that is needful for DNA research without a browser. This would be important only to certain very advanced DNA users.

**Conclusions**:

1. The “Non-Posting” problem is not nearly as much a problem as some people think. This problem can be readily overcome, primarily through the effective use of shared matches. With a modest effort, you should be able to place over 90% of your over 20 cM matches into family branches.
2. Ethnicity results may be fun to look at, but they won’t help us with our DNA research nor our genealogy, because the results are likely to be inaccurate, changing over time, and unhelpful.
3. The DNA scores provided by the different companies, while varying a bit among the companies, are perfectly adequate and accurate for us to work with in doing our research.
4. Each of the different DNA companies offers value, but for most of us, the best value is Ancestry DNA because it has such an enormous database and all of the features we need to meet our needs.