



# The Perry Park

# Sentinel

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## SO YOU THINK YOU'RE IRISH?



Fact or just a family myth? Not sure? DNA tests for ethnicity are all the rage these days—but if you think that will settle your dispute with Great-uncle George about your national origins, you'd be wrong... regardless of what the ads say.

DNA can tell the difference between Celtic genetic history and, say, Saxon history or eastern European history. Different gene quirks. But DNA cannot tell the difference between Irish, Welsh and Scottish any more than it can tell the difference between someone from Larkspur and someone from Castle Rock. They're all Celts and all grouped together when you get your results. Ancestry used to lump them all under "Ireland." Pretty funny in my case since I'm a lot Welsh and a little Scottish—and not Irish at all. The only ancestors I have who lived in Ireland were Presbyterians who got there from Scotland and stayed only one generation before fleeing to the American colonies. I guess enough of us "other" Irish protested because Ancestry has now started using all three country names—but still only one group.

In fact, the ethnic "pie chart" all the ads talk about is pretty much a joke. The percentages are meaningless—and only estimates. Consider: my brother and I are two years apart, same parents, and we share vast amounts of DNA—slightly more than average siblings, in fact. But. His pie chart says he's 79 percent "Great Britain" (which we assume means the Angles and Saxons) while mine says I'm only 8 percent "Great Britain." What??? My chart says I'm 52 percent Western Europe (which means Germany, France, etc.) and he's only three percent western Europe. Crazy, right?

So how does this happen? Simple. From my mother I inherited her father's German DNA and my brother inherited our grandmother's English DNA. He's also only 10 percent "Ireland, Scotland and Wales" while I'm 29 percent! And I'm 8 percent Scandinavian while he has only a trace, too small to measure. I figure the Scandinavian sneaked into England through the Danes—or maybe through the Orkney Isles—Scottish territory, Viking target for raids.

DNA results are great fun—but don't count on the ethnic portion to be accurate like the cousin connections are. Those are indeed accurate. DNA will tell you when an unknown half-sibling appears in your matches. It just won't tell you whether you're Irish or not.

If DNA can't tell you whether you're Irish or Welsh, why worry about it? If you feel Irish this March 17, go on, wear green, drink the green beer, enjoy the day! St. Patrick's Day is, after all, the celebration of an attitude toward life—not a genetic makeup. From time to time we all feel Irish, right?

