

UPDATE – DNA FOR AGS

By Philip Spivey

Through the Trees with AncestryDNA® ThruLines™



As much as I enjoy genealogy and working with DNA, I find the number 117,123 to be pretty intimidating. That is the number of DNA matches I had at Ancestry when I looked it up. I said “had” because it continues to grow. Some might say, all that matters are the close ones. Well, Ancestry defines close matches as those 20cM or greater. That narrows it down to just 4,281.

For all its power, DNA is only as good as the trees you can build to go with it. Solving mysteries takes combining DNA information with genealogical research to identify and confirm relationships. As we have seen, some of these matches have trees and some don't. Some are unlinked and many are private. This makes the process even more complicated.

I'm currently trying to confirm my patrilineal 4th great-grandfather. Relevant matches at this level are going to be around 20cM. For me, that means digging four to five thousand matches deep, not to mention finding trees for those matches. I don't know about you, but that could take me years if ever. Fortunately, Ancestry has a tool that can do the heavy lifting for us. It's called **ThruLines** and here is how it works.

Ancestry's **ThruLines** algorithm takes a look at your matches and the tree you have attached to those matches. It compares those to all the trees it has for those matches. It then provides you with a tree showing how those matches connect to you. In my case, **ThruLines** found 34 matches ranging from 9cM to 37cM that support my hypothesized 4th great-grandfather and it only took a day or so.

As helpful and amazing as that is, it does still require some due diligence on our part to make it work successfully. That starts with building a robust tree that includes the person we believe to be the ancestor we are trying to confirm. The bigger the better. A skeleton tree won't usually do it. Make each generation as complete as you can. In some cases, we may be talking about 5th cousins. That requires a broad tree. The more people you can give it to compare with, the more likely it will be able to help.

Once you have the report, the work doesn't stop there. **ThruLines** is basing the report on the trees those matches have uploaded. As we have learned, people make mistakes in trees. So, we still need to vet those trees. However, it is a heck of a lot easier to vet 20 trees that are already thought to be relevant than it is to sort through and vet thousands.

The tool isn't perfect and won't work for all cases, but it is incredibly powerful and well worth trying. If at first you don't succeed, make your tree bigger and keep checking back because the program is constantly looking.

For more information on how this valuable tool can work for you, visit Ancestry's overview:
<https://support.ancestry.com/s/article/AncestryDNA-ThruLines>

If you're a visual person like me, Ancestry's Christa Cowan can walk you through the process in her video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68IlobGfAlg>