

Cosgrave Y-DNA Journey

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I have been actively involved in tracing my family history for more than 50 years, gradually accumulating more and more information on my forebears, through an insatiable desire to know as much as possible about my ancestry.

In 2015 my maternal first cousin, Jim Sherlock, introduced me to autosomal DNA testing for genealogy and convinced me to test with 23andMe, as he had done. Apart for Jim himself, most DNA matches at that time were fairly distant, but I found myself wanting to determine my genealogical connection to these people with whom I shared DNA, and so I was hooked. You will now find me in the autosomal DNA database of each of the five major players in this field, and over the past five years I have made contact with many distant cousins whom I would not have found without DNA testing, and along the way have helped several new adopted cousins understand their genetic ancestry.

My Cosgrave distant ancestry has always been something of a mystery. I knew that my Cosgrave great great grandfather, James Steele Cosgrave, emigrated from Antrim, Ireland to New Zealand in 1864, and that the land his father farmed in Ireland was previously farmed by an Alexander Cosgrave and before that by a Daniel Cosgrave. Likely his grandfather and great grandfather. Surname dictionaries identify Cosgrave as being a derivative of the Irish clan name O'Cosraigh, suggesting Irish Roman Catholic ancestry, but my lot were Presbyterians, suggesting possibly a Scottish origin, or maybe they just switched religion as some point.

23andMe initially identified my male ancestral line (Y-DNA) haplogroup as R1b1b2a1a2f*, which was later renamed to R-M269. But haplogroup R-M269, and its numerous subgroups, is the most common European male haplogroup, becoming more prevalent as you move west (23% of Polish men and 92% of Welsh men according to Wikipedia), and is shared by 82% of Irish men. Over time, mutations periodically occur in the DNA sequence, and it is the presence of a particular mutation that facilitates identification of how various groups are related. Y-DNA haplogroups are defined by the SNP marker (single nucleotide polymorphism) at which mutation occurs, separating a particular group from its higher level group. All post-mutation generations, will share this same mutation marker. The mutation that defines R-M269 occurred 4,000-10,000 years ago, so is not particularly relevant to recent family history, as there will have been hundreds if not thousands of additional mutations between that time and today. The mutations and corresponding haplogroups provide much information to those who study human migration, but for family history we need to drill down to the more recent mutations to determine how our group relates to other groups living today.

Yearning for better definition of my Y-DNA led me to take a 37 marker test with FamilyTreeDNA (FTDNA) in December of 2015, upgrading to a 67 marker test in March 2016, and a 111 marker test in August 2018. This process was somewhat like peeling an onion, narrowing down my haplogroup to R-L21 and then R-DF21, and finally to R-FGC9749. At this

point I will note that the nomenclature used for Y-DNA haplogroups does not follow any useful structure, so is basically just an identifying point of reference.

FTDNA supports online Y-DNA projects, some of which focus on a particular haplogroup and its subclades, while others focus on a particular surname and its variant spellings, or on a specific geographical area. I started by joining the R_R1b project, but as I peeled the onion, I joined the R L21 project, then the R DF21 project, the Ulster Heritage project and most recently, the Cosgrove surname project.

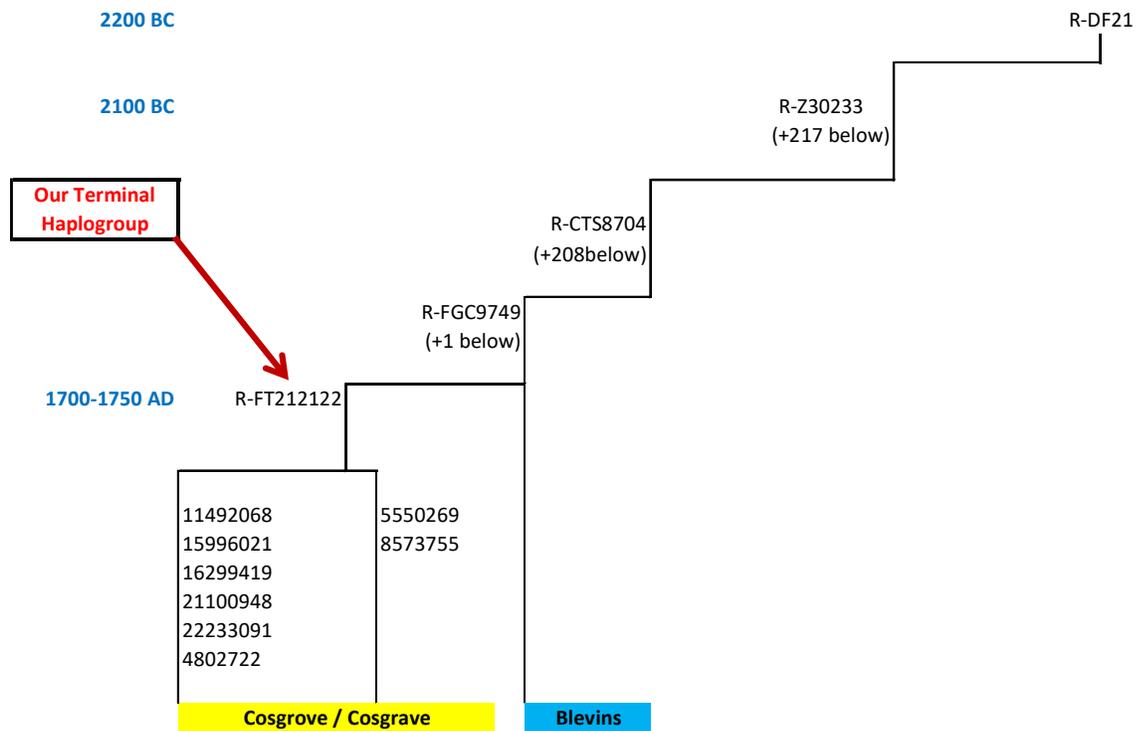
FTDNA considers two people to be a match if 90% or more of their genetic markers are the same – based on a 37 marker test, you have to share 33 or more markers to be considered a match, 60 on a 67 marker test and 100 on a 111 marker test. Up until mid-2019 my Y-DNA matches were all very distant, often had Dutch or Belgian surnames, and there was not a Cosgrave or Cosgrove among them.

Then I was contacted by Isabel Hatcher who is the administrator of her cousin, Patrick Cosgrove's DNA test, and Patrick had done a 37 marker test, which showed us as a match, and his Cosgrove line had been traced back to County Down, about 10 miles away from my Cosgrave's ancestral location in neighbouring County Antrim. Eureka!

Patrick upgraded to the 67 marker test, then the 111 marker test, and finally we both upgraded to the Big Y-700 test, a "next Generation test" which examines 700 STR markers and also more than 780,000 unique SNPs on the Y-chromosome. Patrick's Big Y result identified him as R-FGC9749, the same haplogroup as Danny Blevins and me. I had 25 private (un-named) variants, of which Patrick shared 19, and Patrick had two private variants which I did not share. At last we seemed to be making progress.

But within a few days, the picture changed again at FTDNA. Patrick and I have now been given our own terminal haplogroup – R-FT212122, a sub-clade of R-FGC9749, and it is defined by the 19 private variants that Patrick and I share – anybody else who tests and has the same 19 private variants will be assigned to haplogroup R-FT212122, or depending on their relationship to Patrick and myself, may cause a new subclade to be defined. Assuming that we have had no reverse mutations, R-FT212122 represents the haplogroup of our common ancestor, born somewhere between 1700 and 1750. I have only six private variants from this haplogroup and Patrick has two.

The chart below (format based on a chart used by Maurice Gleeson in the Gleeson surname project), will hopefully provide a clearer picture of how Patrick and myself relate to the higher level haplogroups, and to each other, and will allow for the addition of other close genetic connections as they come to light.



Tests Taken (2)	111, BY7	111, BY7
Kit ID	468983	B427056
Initials	JC	PC
Residence	NZ	England

Ancestral Lines

1700	Daniel?	
1740	Alexander?	
1770	Thomas	
1815	James	Thomas
1840	James	Robert
1885	Vivian	Francis
1915	James	Robert

MDKA Profiles

Forename	Thomas	Thomas
Surname	Cosgrave	Cosgrove
Nickname		
Born in	Antrim?	Down?
YoB	c 1769	c 1812
Died in	Antrim	Longford
Spouse	Margaret Steele	Isabella Geelan
Married in		
First son	Alexander	John
Other	James	Robert

Our hope now is that more Cosgrave / Cosgrove men, with Ulster ancestry, will take the Big Y-700 test, which hopefully will narrow down where and when our common ancestor may have lived.