

Chapter 65

My Revised Ethnicity Estimate on Ancestry.com

[Originally written on 15 September 2020]

Introduction

One of the main features of DNA testing on Ancestry.com is an “ethnicity estimate”. Here is some text from the Ancestry.com website:

Your AncestryDNA® results include your ethnicity estimate, which shows you where your ancestors might have lived hundreds, or even a thousand years ago. Broken down into percentages, the ethnicity estimate tells you approximately how much of your DNA likely came from different regions around the world. For example, you may receive an ethnicity estimate of 50% France, 25% Japan, and 25% Germanic Europe.

Our reference panel is what we compare your DNA to in order to determine your ethnicity estimate. It’s essentially a list of geographic regions, each of which can be identified by genetic similarities shared by its people. To create this reference panel, AncestryDNA® spent years assembling more than 16,000 genetic samples from around the world, searching for people with long, well-documented family connections to a particular place or ethnic group.

My mother’s four grandparents were Swedish immigrants, so I would think that her ethnicity was 100% Swedish. My father’s eight great-grandparents were from families who immigrated to America in the 1600’s; these families largely were from England. My guess is that my ethnicity estimate on Ancestry.com would reflect my known heritage of Swedish and English.

Changes to Ethnicity Estimates on Ancestry.com

In September 2020, Ancestry.com updated its ethnicity estimates. Here is some text from the Ancestry.com website:

Your DNA doesn’t change, but the tools we use to analyze your DNA and determine your ethnicity is [are] constantly evolving. With each update, we’re able to bring more precision to AncestryDNA® results.

Thanks to our freshly updated algorithm and expanded reference panel, we’ve been able to divide larger regions, like the United Kingdom and Ireland, Italy, China, Japan, the Philippines, Eastern Europe, and Southern Africa, into smaller regions. We’ve also added Cyprus as a brand-new region.

See a video about this at:

<https://youtu.be/sPxaXHjCNsU>

Revised Ethnicity Estimates for Burks

In this section, I'll look at my revised ethnicity estimates. Here is the overall summary:



Don't you just love it? 40% Norway. This certainly doesn't make any sense to me. Here is my detailed estimate:



It is amazing that I have so little Sweden and so much Norway. And where did the 1% Nigeria come from?

I next looked at the region that Ancestry.com includes in "Norway" ethnicity:



There are three regions – light yellow, mustard, and olive green – going from higher to lower Norwegian ethnicity. Note that the olive green area does include some of Sweden and some of Denmark. Since several branches of my Swedish ancestors were from the southern part of Sweden (which once was part of Denmark), it wouldn't be too surprising if some of my Swedish ancestors had their origins in Denmark.

I went on to read the section on the Ancestry.com website that has information about people with Norwegian ancestry. Here is an excerpt:

Vikings in Valhalla

During the Scandinavian Iron Age (500 B.C.-800 A.D.), Norwegian culture changed as its people interacted with peoples from Gaul and the Roman Empire. Between 1 and 800 A.D. the Norse people of Scandinavia developed a runic alphabet, sailed to Europe, fought as mercenaries, and traded iron, fish, furs, and skins across the North Sea. They believed in many gods—including Thor, Odin, and Loki—and interpreted nature, their daily actions, and the behavior of those around them in mythological terms. During this period, many Germanic peoples joined Norse coastal villages.

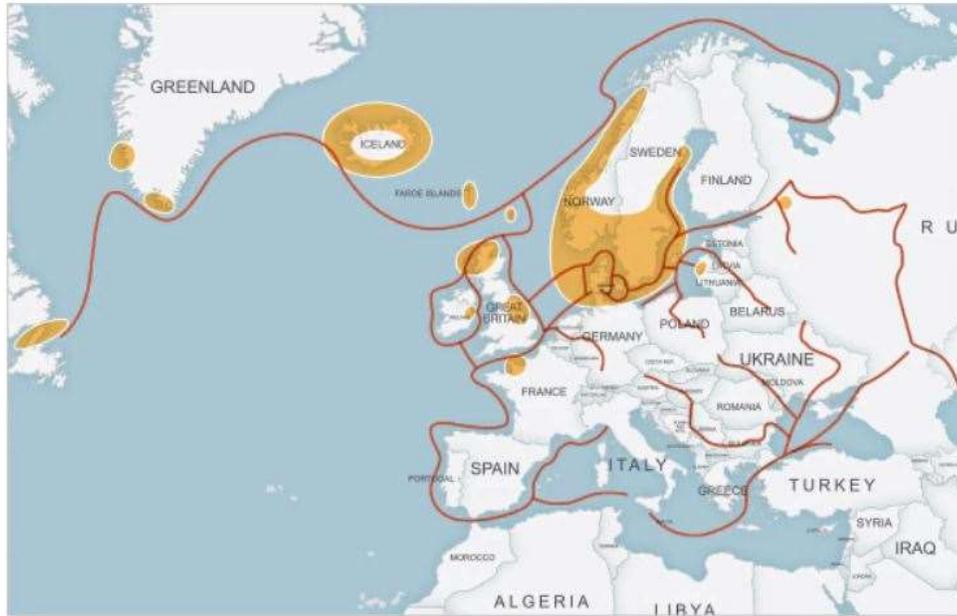
Norse exploration and trade reached its peak between 793 and 1066 A.D. during the Viking Age. Vikings were known for their seamanship, and the Viking-era longship was an engineering marvel of its day. It was quick, narrow, and light, darting through shallow or deep water, powered by oar or sail. From Scandinavia, Vikings sailed the rivers of Europe and the oceans east and west from the Baltic to Byzantium. They settled in Greenland, Iceland, Vinland in North America, and across Europe, leaving their mark on European history.



Viking longships

The section continues with:

While Swedish Vikings became intimidating merchant explorers on the rivers and seas of eastern Europe, the Norwegians and the Danes tended to head west. Danish Vikings invaded and settled northern and eastern England beginning in 876 and managed to control a third of Britain (the Danelaw) for nearly 80 years. The Danish prince Cnut the Great was king of England from 1016 to 1035. He also ruled Denmark and parts of Norway and Sweden.



Territories and voyages of the Vikings, 793 A.D. – 1066 A.D.

In 851 Norwegian and Danish Vikings began settling on the coast of northern France. In 911 the French king granted them control of their own territory on the condition that they help protect France from additional Viking raids. The region became known as Normandy, named for the Viking “North Men” who lived there. Norwegian Vikings also colonized northern Scotland, the Orkneys, the Hebrides, the Isle of Man, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Greenland during the 9th and 10th centuries.

My next thought was that there could be Norwegian DNA in my English ancestors, if I go back 1200 years.

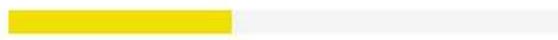
I also learned that in addition to the ethnicity estimates, Ancestry.com provides a range:

Norway

Primarily located in: Faroe Islands, Iceland, Norway

[Learn more about this map and ethnicity](#)

40%



Your ethnicity estimate is 40%, but it can range from 31–56%. ⓘ

In this case, my ethnicity estimate is 40% from Norway, but it could range from 31% to 56%.

Here is my ethnicity estimate for Sweden:

Sweden

Primarily located in: Sweden

[Learn more about this map and ethnicity](#)

17%



Your ethnicity estimate is 17%, but it can range from 0—25%. ⓘ



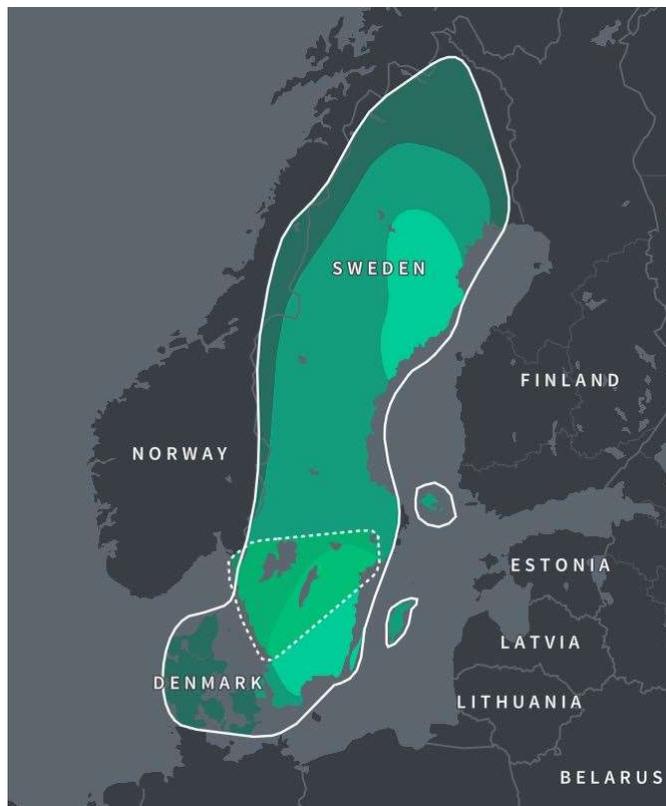
Your connection to this region is most likely through ancestors linked to this community:



Central & Southern Sweden

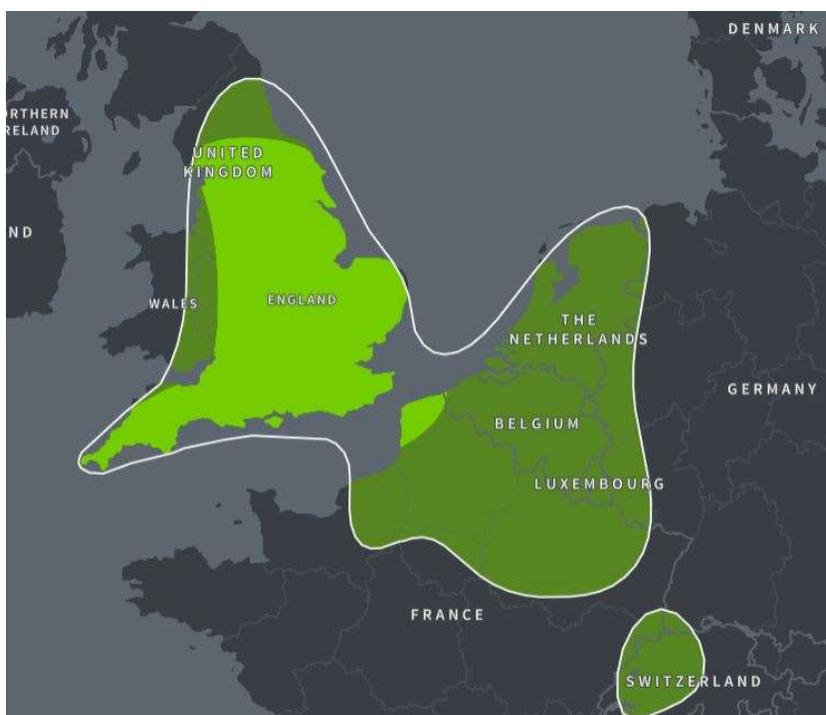


And here is the map showing the regions of Sweden:



Based on where my Swedish ancestors lived, this map is quite accurate.

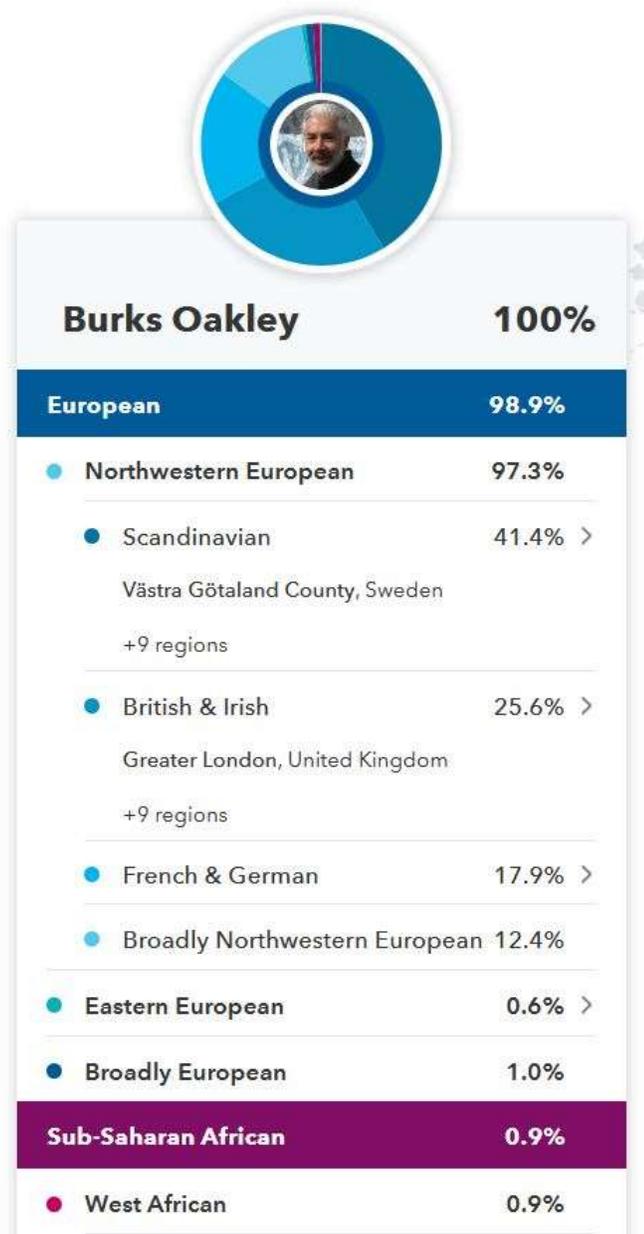
Here is the map for England and Northwest Europe:



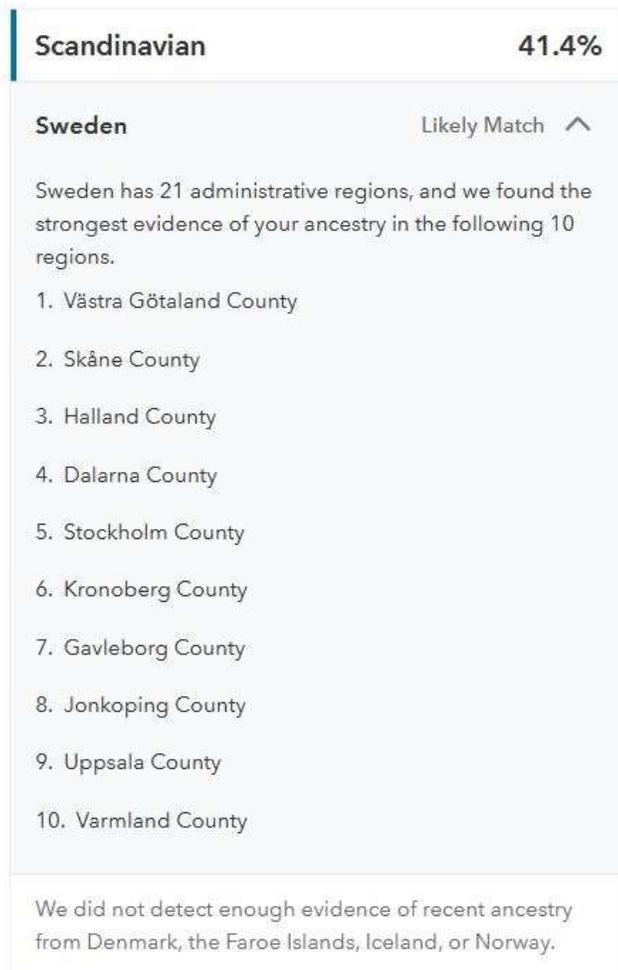
The Ancestry.com website has the following text:

The history of Britain, the heart of our England & Northwestern Europe region, is often presented as one group of invaders after another displacing the native population. The Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, and Normans all left their mark on Britain both politically and culturally. However, the story of Britain is far more complex. In fact, modern studies suggest the earliest populations weren't wiped out, but adapted and absorbed the new arrivals.

I also looked at my ethnicity estimate on 23andme.com:



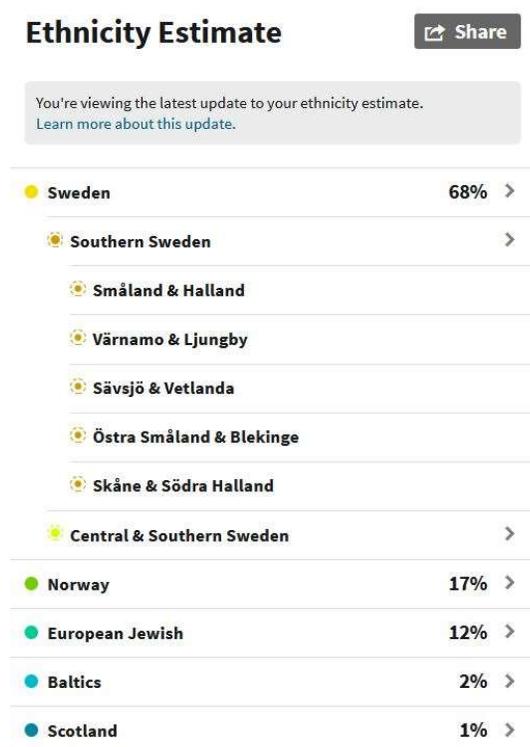
Interesting that the ethnicity estimate on 23andme.com just has Scandinavian. This estimate seems much better to me than the one on Ancestry.com, in the sense that it fits with my notion of what my ethnicity really is.



And this estimate specifically states that they didn't find any "recent ancestry" from Norway. This is really strange in comparison with Ancestry.com – Ancestry has me as 40% Norwegian, while 23andme.com has me as zero Norwegian. Go figure!

Looking at Other Swedish Relatives

I thought it would be interesting to look at my Swedish cousin, Birgit Brorström Tesch. I would have thought that she was ethnically 100% Swedish. Here is her new ethnicity estimate:



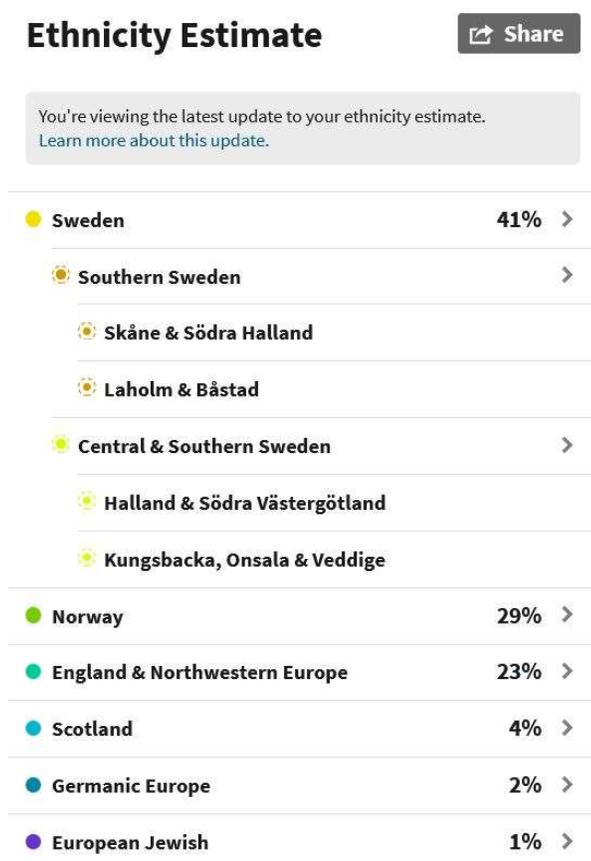
This is interesting! Birgit is only 68% Sweden, and even she has 17% Norway.

I next went on to look at my first-cousins on the Brorström side of my family. Their father and my mother were siblings, so my first guess is that they would have the same amount of Sweden ethnicity as I have. In addition, I expected that all three of them would have similar ethnicity estimates. Here is Susan's profile:



This profile strikes me as strange – 39% Norway and 35% Sweden adds up to 74% Scandinavian. Her mother's ancestors were from Belgium – yet she only has 10% Germanic Europe. And where did her 14% Scotland come from?

Moving on, here is the profile for Susan's sister Annmarie:



Annmarie has 41% Sweden and 29% Norway, so 70% Scandinavian. But then she has 23% England & Northwestern Europe, and just 2% Germanic Europe.

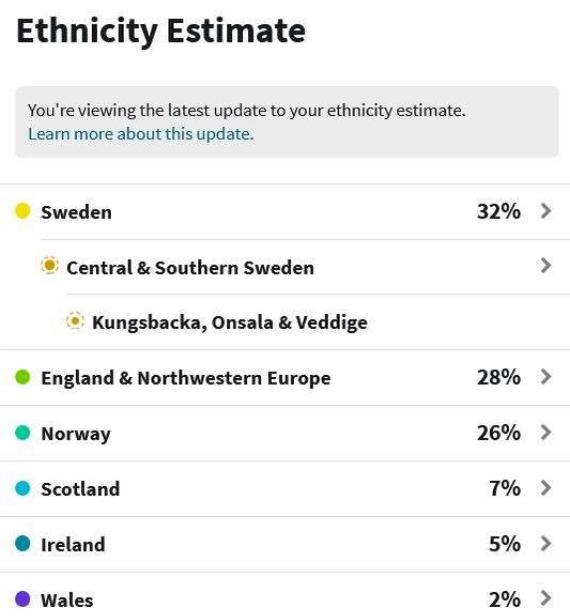
Where is her mother's DNA? And why does she have 23% England & Northwestern Europe, while her sister doesn't have anything from this region?

Here is the profile for their brother Peter Thure:



Peter Thure has 38% Sweden and 27% Norway, so 65% Scandinavian. And he has 12% England and Northwestern Europe, and just 3% Germanic Europe. Where is his mother's contribution? Maybe Harriet's ancestors from Belgium were really Scandinavian. All I can say is that there is amazing variation between these three full siblings, and none of them have the ethnicity that I expected to see.

Susan, Annmarie, and Peter have a half-brother Stuart (they all have the same Swedish-American father). Here is Stuart's ethnicity estimate.



Stuart has 32% Sweden and 26% Norway, for 58% Scandinavian. He has 28% England and Northwestern Europe, plus 7% Scotland, 5% Ireland, and 2% Wales. Stuart's mother's side of the family goes back to early colonial times in America, and he has a number of ancestral lines going back to England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. So this is about what I expected – but still too much Norway compared to Sweden.

Go back to Ancestry.com & Norway

Recall that the Ancestry.com website has a narrative for people with Norwegian ancestry. Here again is a short excerpt:

While Swedish Vikings became intimidating merchant explorers on the rivers and seas of eastern Europe, the Norwegians and the Danes tended to head west. Danish Vikings invaded and settled northern and eastern England beginning in 876 and managed to control a third of Britain (the Danelaw) for nearly 80 years. The Danish prince Cnut the Great was king of England from 1016 to 1035. He also ruled Denmark and parts of Norway and Sweden.



Territories and voyages of the Vikings, 793 A.D. – 1066 A.D.

In 851 Norwegian and Danish Vikings began settling on the coast of northern France. In 911 the French king granted them control of their own territory on the condition that they help protect France from additional Viking raids. The region became known as Normandy, named for the Viking “North Men” who lived there. Norwegian Vikings also colonized northern Scotland, the Orkneys, the Hebrides, the Isle of Man, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Greenland during the 9th and 10th centuries.

This mentions the Danish Prince Cnut the Great, who was King of Denmark, England, and Norway. Just for fun I look to see if I am descended from him. Here is his entry on Geni.com:



Cnut The Great Sweynsson, King Of England And Denmark

Birth: circa 995
Danmark (Denmark)

Death: November 12, 1035 (35-44)
Shaftesbury, Dorsetshire, England (United Kingdom)

Place of Burial: Winchester Cathedral, London, England (United Kingdom)

Immediate Family: Son of Sweyn I "Forkbeard", king of Denmark, Norway & England and Świętosława «Gunhilda» Mieszkówna
Husband of Emma Ælfgifu of Normandy and Ælfgifu
Father of Harthacnut, King of Denmark and England; Gunnhild Knutsdottir, af Danmark; Harold I Harefoot, King of England and Sweno

Here is our relationship chart:



Oh my! Cnut the Great was my 30th-great grandfather. This ancestral line goes back through my 2nd-great grandfather, Ezra Marvin Miller (1812-1874). Wow, another European king in my pedigree!

Here is an excerpt from the Wikipedia entry for Cnut the Great:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cnut_the_Great

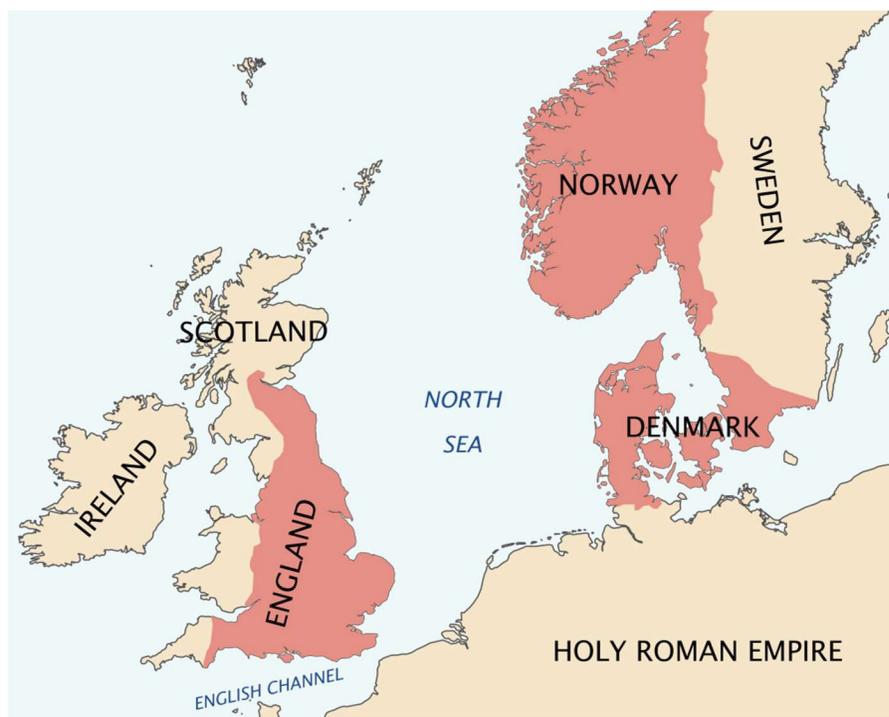
Cnut the Great (died 12 November 1035), also known as Canute, was king of Denmark, England and Norway; together often referred to as the North Sea Empire. Yet after the deaths of his heirs within a decade of his own, and the Norman conquest of England in 1066, this legacy was lost. He is popularly invoked in the context of the legend of King Canute and the tide, which often misrepresents him as a deluded monarch believing he has supernatural powers, contrary to the original legend which portrays a wise king who rebuked his courtiers for their fawning behavior.

As a Danish prince, Cnut won the throne of England in 1016 in the wake of centuries of Viking activity in northwestern Europe. His later accession to the Danish throne in 1018 brought the crowns of England and Denmark together. Cnut sought to keep this power-base by uniting Danes and

English under cultural bonds of wealth and custom, as well as through sheer brutality. After a decade of conflict with opponents in Scandinavia, Cnut claimed the crown of Norway in Trondheim in 1028. The Swedish city Sigtuna was held by Cnut (he had coins struck there that called him king, but there is no narrative record of his occupation). In 1031, Malcolm II of Scotland also submitted to him, though Anglo-Norse influence over Scotland was weak and ultimately did not last by the time of Cnut's death.

Dominion of England lent the Danes an important link to the maritime zone between the islands of Great Britain and Ireland, where Cnut, like his father before him, had a strong interest and wielded much influence among the Norse-Gaels. Cnut's possession of England's dioceses and the continental Diocese of Denmark—with a claim laid upon it by the Holy Roman Empire's Archdiocese of Hamburg-Bremen—was a source of great prestige and leverage within the Catholic Church and among the magnates of Christendom (gaining notable concessions such as one on the price of the pallium of his bishops, though they still had to travel to obtain the pallium, as well as on the tolls his people had to pay on the way to Rome). After his 1026 victory against Norway and Sweden, and on his way back from Rome where he attended the coronation of the Holy Roman Emperor, Cnut, in a letter written for the benefit of his subjects, deemed himself "King of all England and Denmark and the Norwegians and of some of the Swedes". The Anglo-Saxon kings used the title "king of the English". Cnut was *ealles Engla landes cyning* – "king of all England". Medieval historian Norman Cantor called him "the most effective king in Anglo-Saxon history".

Here is a map showing the lands ruled by Cnut the Great:



How about additional lines back to Cnut the Great? The "shortest blood line" I showed goes through Ezra Marvin Miller. So I decided to look at my other ancestral lines. Here is Lucy Ann Eunice Darling (1804-1884) – she was my 2nd-great grandmother:

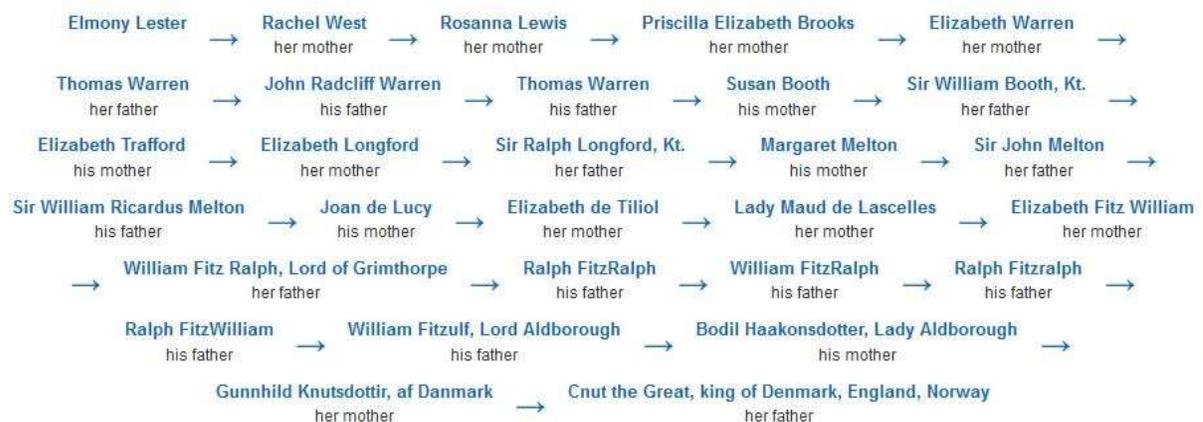
Cnut the Great, king of Denmark, England, Norway is Lucy Ann Eunice Darling's 27th great grandfather.



On this line, Cnut the Great was my 31st-great grandfather. Note that both this line and the previous line go through Isabel FitzWilliam.

Here is another line going through Elmony Lester (1815-1855), who was another of my 2nd-great grandmothers:

Cnut the Great, king of Denmark, England, Norway is Elmony Lester's 26th great grandfather.



On this line, Cnut the Great was my 30th-great grandfather.

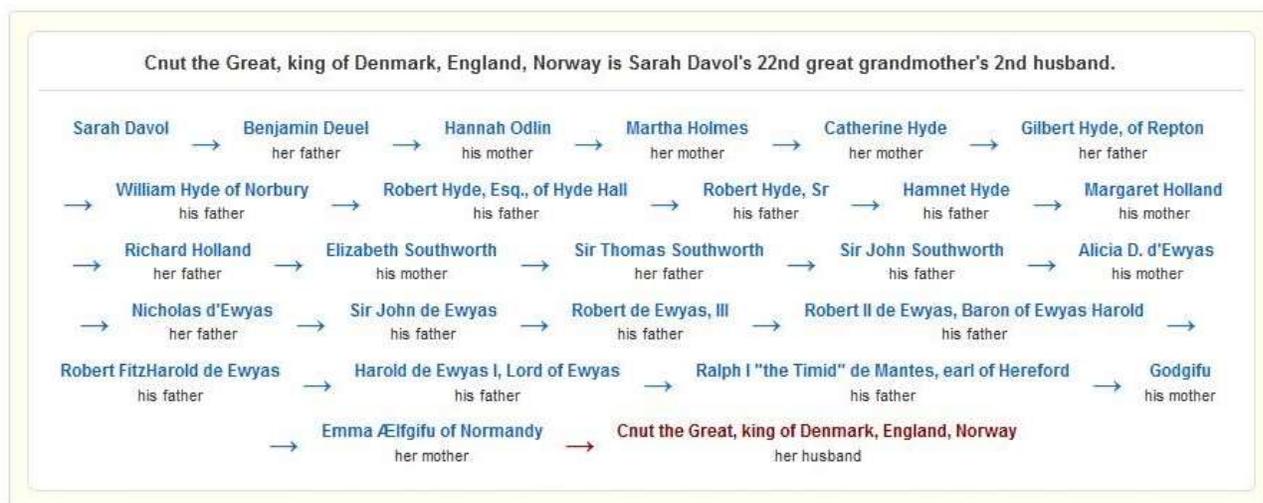
Here is an in-law relationship to Amzi Oakley:

Cnut the Great, king of Denmark, England, Norway is Amzi Oakley's 24th great grandmother's 2nd husband.



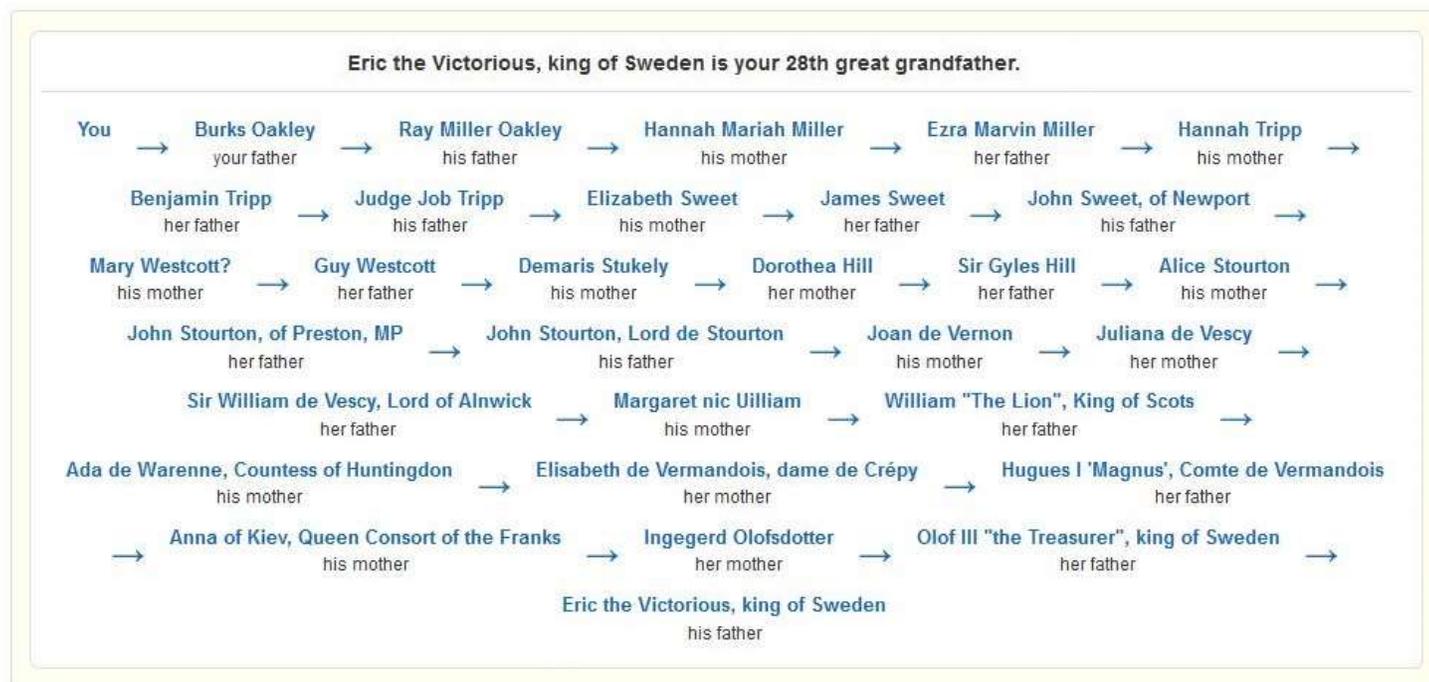
Cnut the Great was the second husband of Amzi's 24th great grandmother.

I think I could keep doing this all day, but I'll quit after this next one. Here is another in-law relationship going back through Sarah Davol (1709-1783), who was one of my 5th-great grandmothers:



Cnut the Great was the second husband of Sarah's 22nd-great grandmother. Phew!

Well, maybe just one more thing. The extensive Wikipedia article about Cnut the Great includes "Adam of Bremen ... is unique in equating Cnut's mother with the former queen of Sweden, wife of Eric the Victorious..." So of course, I had to see if I was descended from Eric the Victorious, and I am!



Eric the Victorious was my 28th-great grandfather on an ancestral line going back through my 2nd-great grandfather Ezra Marvin Miller. There are some impressive people in this ancestral line.

Here is a brief excerpt from the Wikipedia article about Eric the Victorious:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_the_Victorious

Eric the Victorious (c. 945 – c. 995) was a Swedish monarch as of around 970. Since he is the first Swedish king in a consecutive regnal succession,

who is attested in sources independent of each other, Sweden's list of rulers usually begins with him. His son Olof Skötkonung, however, is considered the first ruler documented to definitely have been accepted both by the original Swedes around Lake Mälaren and by the Geats around Lake Vättern, which peoples were fundamental in forming the nation of Sweden.

Some sources have referred to Eric the Victorious as either King Eric V or Eric VI, modern inventions by counting backwards from Eric XIV (1560–1568), who adopted his numeral according to a mythological history of Sweden. Whether or not there were any Swedish monarchs named Eric before Eric the Victorious is disputed, with some historians claiming that there were several earlier Erics, and others questioning the reliability of the primary sources used and the existence of these earlier monarchs.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed my most recent ethnicity estimate from the Ancestry.com website. According to this estimate, my ethnicity is 40% Norway, 34% England and Northwestern Europe, 17% Sweden, and 5% Germanic Europe, with a few other minor contributions. I am at a loss as to why my Norway ethnicity is so high, unless some of this is from Sweden and some from Norwegian Vikings who left their DNA in England.

I also reviewed my Swedish-American first-cousins' ethnicity estimates, and I was surprised to see the variability between Peter Thure, Annmarie, and Susan. I would have thought that they would be very similar, and they really have significant differences. And maybe this says something about the accuracy of these "estimates".

Finally, my reading about Vikings and where they went in Europe led me to the Danish prince Cnut the Great, who was King of Denmark, England, and Norway. He was my 30th-great grandfather on several ancestral lines, and my 31st-great grandfather on another. I also learned that Eric the Victorious, King of Sweden, was my 28th-great grandfather.