

GSSCC - - DNA SIG - - handout
Enhanced Shared Matches at Ancestry
(one of the tools at Pro Tools)

©September 3, 2024 - - by Gail Burk

Ancestry Pro Tools requires an active Ancestry family history membership. Pro Tools is an add-on subscription, separate from your regular Ancestry subscription. The current price is \$10 per month. There are other tools in the Pro Tools toolkit in addition to the Enhanced Shared Matches tool. The Enhanced Shared Matches is one of the most useful of the Pro Tools.

Once you have subscribed to Pro Tools, you can access the Enhanced Shared Matches tool in a variety of ways. There is a shortcut link on your Ancestry home page, or you can go to the Pro Tools dashboard and click on Enhanced Shared Matches. In the alternative, you can go directly to your shared DNA matches list, click on a match of interest, and use the shared matches tab for that match. When you click on the shared matches tab, you will automatically see the matches of the selected match in the Pro Tools format. You can use Enhanced Shared Matches with your entire match list, or you can apply this tool within a selected group if you have used Ancestry's colored dot system to group your matches.

When you click on a match's name, that person becomes your "selected match." When you click on the shared matches tab for that selected match, you will see the list of your matches who also match your selected match.

In the Enhanced Shared Matches view, you will see three columns of information. You are the middle column. How you relate to the shared matches of your selected match shows in the left-hand column. How each of the shared matches in the left column relates to your selected match is shown in the right-hand column. There may be several pages of matches you share with your selected match. The page quantity is shown on the bottom left of the shared match page.

The shared matches of your selected match are listed on the left in descending order, *ranked by how much DNA they share with you*. The matches of your selected match who share the most DNA with you are listed at the top of the left column. This list will include low-level matches, down to 8 cMs (or lower, if you've saved your 6 cM and 7 cM matches).

How much DNA each shared match shares with your selected match is shown on the right, and will only show DNA amounts of 20 cM or more. The amounts of shared DNA shown in the right-hand column are not ranked in order by cMs shared with your selected match. Thus, it is important to review the entire list of relationships, because someone who shares only a few cMs with you may be a close relative of your selected match.

It may be that the shared matches of your selected match share no more DNA with your selected match than you do. Sometimes, though, several members of your selected match's shared match group will have done DNA testing and will show up as close relatives of your selected match. Even if your selected match doesn't have a useful tree, some of your selected match's close relatives may have linked or unlinked trees that provide valuable clues.

By charting the relationships of the close shared matches to your selected match, you can piece together a web of DNA matches who match with you, and who are part of an extended family group with each other. My goal is to link these various family webs together within an established DNA group. I like to use private, non-searchable research trees at Ancestry for the purpose of keeping track of who is related to whom, and how. This enables me to see supporting documents and hints from other genealogists who are researching this same family, but who may not themselves be a DNA match to me. Of course, you can also use tree-building software such as Family Treemaker, Legacy, or Roots Magic, etc., for this purpose.

Each time I find a close match among the shared matches of my selected match, I click on that person to see who his or her close matches are. This can help clarify ambiguous relationships. Often, I get lucky and discover that shared match B is the parent or sibling of shared match A; and shared match C is the parent or sibling of shared match B. Many times, I'm able to find aunts, uncles, and first cousins of my selected match.

A quick way to find the closest matches to your selected match is to scan the cM amounts listed in the right-hand column of the shared match list. Remember, the closest matches to your selected match may not be toward the top of the right-hand column, and they are probably not all clumped together, because the shared matches of your selected match are listed in order of highest amount of DNA they share with you, not the highest amount of DNA they share with your selected match.

I've done a lot of grouping of my Ancestry DNA matches, and have undertaken a fair amount of descendancy research as well. Thus, I've already identified most of my closer DNA matches and have added them to my working tree at Ancestry. I have a number of brick walls, however, at the third great-grandparent generation and earlier. I also have many mystery DNA matches at the fourth-to-sixth cousin level and lower. I'm hoping to use Enhanced Shared Matches to make some break-throughs among these more distant DNA cousins, with the hope of eventually making progress in extending some of the problematic lines of my tree.

Of course, the complication in working with more distant matches, even with the Enhanced Shared Matches tool, is that the more distant the match, the more potential relationships there are. The lower amounts of shared DNA can point to any number of overlapping potential relationships. That's where getting back to solid genealogical research comes in!