

Calling all Armstrongs! Scientists now say the Scottish Borderland Armstrong family stems from further north – and largely from one man. Armstrong males are being asked to take a DNA test to confirm exciting new research

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500 years ago the Armstrongs were the most dangerous family on the Scottish Borderland. And now, it seems, these riders and raiders came not from Southern Scotland, but from further north. Geneticists say new evidence shows that this powerful reiving clan originated in places like Angus, Moray, or Fife – and that the **vast majority of** Borderland Armstrongs stem from one man.

Dr Jim Wilson, ‘Scotland’s DNA’ Chief Scientist, has discovered that the haplogroup the Armstrongs descend from originated not on the English/Scottish divide, but in ancient Pictland. Their distinctive Y chromosome rises to above 1% of all men in places like Perthshire, Fife and Tayside - and it arose perhaps 3,000 years ago.

His scientific research also points to the fact that the **mainstream** Armstrongs descend from one man: around a thousand years ago, this person moved to the English/Scottish border - and became the progenitor of a great reiving family. How is it possible to be sure? Geneticists can recognize what are known as ‘expansion clusters’, groups of men who carry closely-related DNA markers that point to a common male ancestor. Dr Wilson has recognized just such a cluster in Armstrong men originating in the Borderlands.

We know that kings, princes and other powerful men mated with different women in the past. The original Armstrongs must have been able to access several females and were able to spread their DNA widely and have many sons, who, in turn, could repeat the process. An example of this was in 15th century Ireland. Lord Turlough O’Donnell fathered 14 sons and had 59 male grandchildren. If the same level of enthusiasm and fertility were sustained, Lord Turlough would have had 248 great grandsons and 1,040 great, great grandsons. In four generations, the man could have bred an army.

This is thought to be the pattern of genetic inheritance that happened with the first Armstrong who came from ancient Pictland to settle in the Borders: the begetter of a great name, and also of men who shaped Scottish history. Highland clans were feared because they formed a family army and fought for each other. Borderland Armstrongs were similar. Their Heidsman could put 4,000 men in the saddle and wherever they rode, to fight, or raid, they were also feared.

Broadcaster and writer, Alastair Moffat, who is working on the DNA project with Professor Wilson says, **‘the question is – who was this Highland man who sired a Borderland army? Can Armstrong genealogists help? How many Armstrongs are descended from him? We need many more Armstrong men to come forward to have their DNA tested. This is a story only DNA can tell...’**

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