if I knew any male Munros willing to participate. Their DNA would be collected and compared with Margaret's nearest male Munro relative and other American Munros/Monroes.

Twenty years ago I could have named 15-25 different Munros but the passage of time had whittled this down. At short notice I could think of only two: Dr Duncan Munro is a retired General Practitioner in Milngavie near Glasgow (Scotland) and Charlie Munro is a retired technician from the Montreal Deaf School Board (Canada). Both agreed to take the test and, to Margaret's delight, they compared 24 out of 25 markers. There was a high statistical probability that within the past 400 to 600 years or so they had a common male ancestor.

When an Ian Munro from New South Wales, Australia, got in touch we found we were 4th cousins and he was the male of my Munro line needed for the DNA test. His great-grandfather John Munro was my great-grandmother's full cousin, and had emigrated to Australia in the 19th century. Ian agreed to take the test, and again he was a match, which pleased me greatly because it gave me information about my own ancestry that I could not supply.

This "datum information" has now been used on US Monroes, and to date three have matched. Others on both sides of the Atlantic haven't matched, which shows people of the name to have different origins, but the positive side of the test is that all known Inveraray Munros tested so far have matched back to a common male ancestor.

I know the Inveraray Munros inhabit a very small gene pool, especially when compared to persons of the name and clan of Campbell. Lying in between are members of Clan Gregor, possessors of the surnames MacGregor, Grierson, Grier, etc. They are much more populous in world terms than Munros of Inveraray origin, but still nowhere near the scale of the Campbells. Richard McGregor, their Project Co-ordinator, had published a table with the Y chromosome DNA results of 14 named people. (The current status of the research, which was updated in September 2003 and now includes over 50 people, may be viewed at www.clangregor.org).

This table showed three people sharing exactly the same DNA markers: a representative of the chiefly Glencarnock (Glen Carnaig) line; a representative of the Glengyle line (to which Rob Roy belonged); and another MacGregor from Perthshire whose ancestry is not stated.

The data supported the recorded descent from a 14th century male (named Gregor) who in turn traditionally was a descendant of the Clann Ailpein of the 12th & 13th century. The known ancestor of Glengyle was Dughall Ciar Mor (Big Brown Dugal), and according to the late 19th century "History of Clan Gregor," the Clan Dughaill Ciar moved to Glengyle on the east shore of Loch Katrine around 1533.

Another testee on this table represented the line of Roro in Glen Lyon. He compared with 24 of the 25 markers to the other three, which Richard says is entirely consistent with the known split of this ancient and senior branch of the clan from the main branch in the late 14th/early 15th century. They first appear on record in the early 15th century, holding their lands in Glenlyon until they were sold in 1760. However more recent research suggests that this result may have been due to something called a random genetic mutation, as another testee claiming Roro descent has come out with a 25 out of 25 marker comparison to the other three.

None of the remaining testees on the original table compared closely with the above four. On the list were 4 other MacGregors, 2 MacAdams (a name supposedly taken by MacGregors during their period of proscription), and 4 other names representing septs. Richard, who has only 9 of the first 12 markers comparing, now reckons that his male ancestor in common with the leading MacGregors lived about 2,000 years ago, in other words long before the adoption of surnames!

Richard's explanation of this should serve as a cautionary tale for the Argyll/ Breadalbane claimants of Clan Campbell, but never the less it is a fact we continually write about in the Journal: early clanspeople might be related by blood, but in fact they were often related through community. People would be welcomed into the community after moving from elsewhere, living together with their new "clan" and often adopting the sire-name of the principal leader of the community. In some cases this did not happen, for example the Inveraray Munros obviously did not feel the need to change their names, whereas the MacGregors often took the names of the people in the communities offering them protection (Murray, Drummond and Campbell being the favourites).

Richard McGregor refers to those in a community not related by blood as "part takers", and when descendants of such people moved away from their adoptive communities, often after several generations, the taken name would become their fixed surname.

To my mind this is one valuable asset of DNA testing: helping to answer the question "where do we actually come from?" Groups of people, sub groups within the larger clans, of people sharing 24 or 25 out of 25 Y chromosome markers may be identified as coming from the same community, or locality, eg: Skye & the Hebrides, Inveraray & Loch Fyne, Ayrshire or Perthshire, Cawdor & Nairn, etc. This is the case with the Inveraray Munros, who so far have not matched with other Munros from the more traditional Easter Ross. In instances where whole communities uplifted and went overseas, such as those people on Campbell lands in Glen Quoich in Breadalbane who went to Canada, DNA testing of people with a tradition of this descent would help prove or disprove it. The same could be applied to find descendants of Argyll MacIvers who became Campbells.

It is the mistaken expectation of proving descent from a notable of the clan that is the downside of DNA testing: myths are destroyed and one of the real benefits of the clan, the common kindred, is lost. I have received a lot of correspondence over the years from members, often with a claim to be a long lost member of the Argyll or Breadalbane families (far more often than either Loudoun or Cawdor: why is this?) This is fortunately balanced by the correspondents with no such aspirations, only the desire to belong to the clan, the great family of Campbell, and find out more about their roots in the Old Country. This latter group have no pretentions to myths, and are happy to advance their knowledge and just to belong. OK, they would like a good story, but are still happy even when it cannot be proved: we all have our dreams.

When I started researching my own family history most of the information came from my older relatives but I was also spurred on by a story told by the Scots

Ancestry Research Society (an obsolete body). This involved an American client of theirs whose ancestry had been taken back to a coalminer. Undaunted, he had paid for more research and the coalminer was found to be a descendant of King Robert II (not really surprising, as he had 17 children!) I never did get a descent back to King Robert II, or anyone else famous or infamous, but have been content with what has been found so far. To date there has been no Y chromosome project to link various Beatons back in the male line to the notable medical doctors and herbalists associated with the MacDonald lords of the Isles, or even the Bethunes of Balfour in Fife who claim a French origin.

Richard McGregor also tabulated results comparing the MacGregor "datum" with the results of some unidentified Campbells, and the results were remarkable. 18 out of 21 matching markers point to a common male ancestor, but probably more than 700 years ago! (The original test two years ago was 21, not 25 markers). Is this an indication of a common ancestor for clans Gregor and Campbell, or do these cases represent Campbell part takers who were originally MacGregors?

This note is an attempt to put into layman's terms some of the facts and theories surrounding DNA, and as such will not please everyone. There are also a couple of cautionary notes: firstly, all results are subject to something called random genetic mutation (mentioned briefly above), and statistical variation. As with carbon dating in archaeology, the time period can never be precise. Secondly, there is a claim made by Professor Bryan Sykes of Oxford, a leading authority on the use of DNA, that if 1% of each generation are not their father's biological offspring (the most common reasons being fosterage, adoption and marital infidelity) then up to 50% of the claimed descendants of a man living in the 13th century will not in fact be descendants!

DNA is a great tool for establishing roots, but don't participate if you don't like surprises!