

Y-DNA Groupings for MacNeils

Y-DNA is being used to rewrite the history of the Clan MacNeil. Y-DNA is passed from father to son and is not passed on to daughters. A man has his father's Y-DNA signature; however, Y-DNA mutates slowly over time. The more distant the connection is between two men the less Y-DNA they have in common. Since surnames are traditionally passed through the father's line, Y-DNA is excellent for surname studies.

As expected, the men of Clan MacNeil do not all descend from a common ancestor. This is the case with all of the major Clan groups. MacNeil men who have tested their Y-DNA can be sorted into categories. The descriptions below were created by Alex Buchanan, Administrator of the Clan MacNeil Project at Family Tree DNA. The groupings are based on Haplogroup and sometimes SNP results for participants in the MacNeil Project thus far. The frequency numbers represent the number of men who fit into a given category with the MacNeil surname (and its variants) as of October 31, 2014. Most participants can be placed in a group with either Viking, old Celtic or some other origins.

Grouping	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Barra R1a, L176+ (Norse)	Closely matches the Chiefly MacDonalds, said to descend from Somerled. The Piper MacNeils of Barra belong to this group.	10	4%
Other R1a	This is a subgroup for R1a MacNeils who are not L176+	1	0.4%
Barra R1b, L165+ (Norse)	This distinctive haplotype was almost confined to Barra. There are two variants, the less common 15:15 motif seems to represent the Chiefly line. Both variants are L165+, as are some other clans from the same region, notably the MacLeods. This is the most common Halpogroup from Barra.	48	21%
Skye R1b, L165+ (Norse)	Related to Barra R1b and now known to be from the Isle of Skye. Many McLeod matches.	6	3%
Colonsay R1b, L21+ > L513+	This is an R1b family from Colonsay. Not to be confused with the family of the 'Lords of Colonsay' who	2	0.8%

	belong in the 'Kintyre II d' subgroup, they are a branch of the old Tainish McNeill lineage.		
Gigha-Islay R1b, L21+	A cluster of 'Old Celtic' McNeills from the islands of Argyll	5	2.2%
Related R1b families with history in both Argyll and Antrim, L21+	Families associated with Antrim	4	1.8%
Kintyre R1b	Two McNeills known to have origins in Kintyre but not placeable in another group	2	0.8%
'Dalriadic' Scot R1b, L21+ > CTS11722+	This is a diverse group to accommodate R1b (probably all L21+) who don't fit anywhere else. Some are CTS11722+	22	10%
Dunbartonshire R1b	This group consists of a family from Luss in eastern Dunbartonshire (on the western shore of Loch Lomond), they emigrated to Dunedin, New Zealand in 1849 and settled at Balclutha. Another NZ family from Reefton then Patea was later found to match the ex-Luss family and is included here too. Another family from Dumfries-shire and now living in Australia is also included here.	4	2%
Arran R1b, U152+	The McNeills of Arran are probably all one family, but their origins before Arran are unknown.	3	1%
NW Irish R1b, M222+	All are believed to be M222+	33	15%
Antrim R1b, U106+ > Z2+ (so called 'Frisian')	A cluster some of whom have ancestry in Co. Antrim but origins otherwise unknown. Further testing is required to see if they	5	2%

	would all be Z2+		
Other Scottish/Irish R1b.	Don't fit in above categories	23	10%
Haplogroup G	Associated with the Middle East and Caucasus	1	0.4%
Haplogroup I1, Scots AS6	All three men here descend from a common ancestor	3	1%
Kintyre I1d, L22+ > CTS9346+ (Norse). This is very probably the old Tainish lineage.	All indications are that this group descends from the large and influential McNeill family who traditionally descend from Torquil of Castle Sween and who became the McNeills (various spellings) of Tainish and Gigha. They held large estates in Kintyre and expanded to Co Antrim in 'plantation times'. Many descendants migrated to North Carolina etc.	41	18%
Haplogroup I2a, P37+ > L160+	I participant with the spelling MacNeill and one Neil	2	0.8%
Haplogroup I2b, L126+. Includes MacNeils from the tiny island of Sandray.	The MacNeils of Sandray belong here. Sandray is a very small island just south of Barra. Why the Sandray people should be so different is not known.	7	3%
Other I2b MacNeils	Don't fit above	4	2%
Haplogroup J2	Associated with the Middle East	1	0.4%

Based on the results of our Clan MacNeil Y-DNA study so far, we can see that not all MacNeil men descend from a common ancestor. The MacNeil men of Barra thus far appear to be either R1b, R1a or I2b.

If you would like to join the MacNeil Y-DNA project or for additional information, visit our surname project at <https://www.familytreedna.com/group-join.aspx?Group=MacNeil> Many women have participated by having their MacNeil brothers fathers and male cousins tested.

The history of our clan is in our genes!!! Please consider helping us rewrite the story.