

| PublisherInfo | | |
|----------------------|---|----------------|
| PublisherName | : | BioMed Central |
| PublisherLocation | : | London |
| PublisherImprintName | : | BioMed Central |

One potato, two potato

| ArticleInfo | | |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| ArticleID | : | 4110 |
| ArticleDOI | : | 10.1186/gb-spotlight-20010607-01 |
| ArticleCitationID | : | spotlight-20010607-01 |
| ArticleSequenceNumber | : | 181 |
| ArticleCategory | : | Research news |
| ArticleFirstPage | : | 1 |
| ArticleLastPage | : | 2 |
| ArticleHistory | : | RegistrationDate : 2001-06-07 OnlineDate : 2001-06-07 |
| ArticleCopyright | : | BioMed Central Ltd2001 |
| ArticleGrants | : | |
| ArticleContext | : | 130592211 |

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The plant pathogen *Phytophthora infestans* causes late blight disease in potatoes and was responsible for the Irish potato famine of 1845. In the June 7 *Nature*, Ristaino *et al.* report a molecular characterization of historic potato samples from the nineteenth century epidemics (*Nature* 2001, **411**:695-697). They used PCR amplification and sequencing of short mitochondrial DNA fragments, to investigate the history of *P. infestans* haplotypes. Their results confirm that *P. infestus* infections accompanied the Irish potato famine. Furthermore, the historic lesions did not contain the mitochondrial DNA haplotype 1b, challenging current theories about the ancestry of modern *P. infestus* strains. The authors make an impassioned plea for the importance of herbarium archive collections in historical analysis.

References

1. *Phytophthora* genome consortium, [<http://www.ncgr.org/pgc/index.html>]
2. *Nature* , [<http://www.nature.com>]