

# ChromHeatMap

Tim F. Rayner

April 28, 2026

Cambridge Institute of Medical Research

## 1 Introduction

The **ChromHeatMap** package provides functions for visualising expression data in a genomic context, by generating heat map images in which data is plotted along a given chromosome for all the samples in a data matrix.

These functions rely on the existence of a suitable **AnnotationDbi** package which provides chromosome location information for the probe- or gene-level identifiers used in your data set. The data themselves must be in either an **ExpressionSet**, or a data matrix with row names corresponding to probe or gene identifiers and columns corresponding to samples. While the **ChromHeatMap** package was originally designed for use with microarray data, given an appropriate **AnnotationDbi** package it can also be used to visualise data from next-generation sequencing experiments.

The output heatmap can include sample clustering, and data can either be plotted for each strand separately, or both strands combined onto a single heat map. An idiogram showing the cytogenetic banding pattern of the chromosome will be plotted for supported organisms (at the time of writing: *Homo sapiens*, *Mus musculus* and *Rattus norvegicus*; please contact the maintainer to request additions).

Once a heat map has been plotted, probes or genes of interest can be identified interactively. These identifiers may then be mapped back to gene symbols and other annotation via the **AnnotationDbi** package.

## 2 Data preparation

Expression data in the form of a data matrix must initially be mapped onto its corresponding chromosome coordinates. This is done using the `makeChrStrandData`:

```
> library('ALL')
> data('ALL')
> selSamples <- ALL$mol.biol %in% c('ALL1/AF4', 'E2A/PBX1')
> ALLs <- ALL[, selSamples]
> library('ChromHeatMap')
> chrdata<-makeChrStrandData(exprs(ALLs), lib='hgu95av2')
```

The output *chrdata* object here contains the expression data indexed by coordinate. Note that the `makeChrStrandData` function is based on the `Makesense` function in the **geneplotter** package, removing the internal call to `lowess` to avoid smoothing the data (which is undesirable in this case). The `makeChrStrandData` function is used specifically because it incorporates information on both the start and end chromosome coordinates for each locus. This allows the `plotChrMap` function to accurately represent target widths on the chromosome plot.

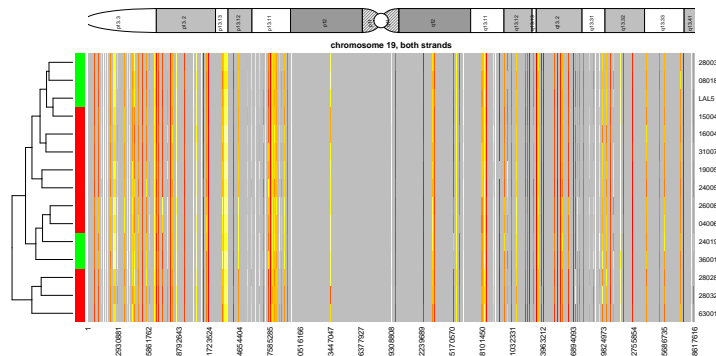
### 3 Plotting the heat map

Once the data has been prepared, a single call to `plotChrMap` will generate the chromosome heat map. There are many options available for this plot, and only a couple of them are illustrated here. Here we generate a whole-chromosome plot (chromosome 19), with both strands combined into a single heat map:

```
> groupcol <- ifelse( ALLs$mol.biol == 'ALL1/AF4', 'red', 'green' )
> plotChrMap(chrdata, 19, strands='both', RowSideColors=groupcol)
```

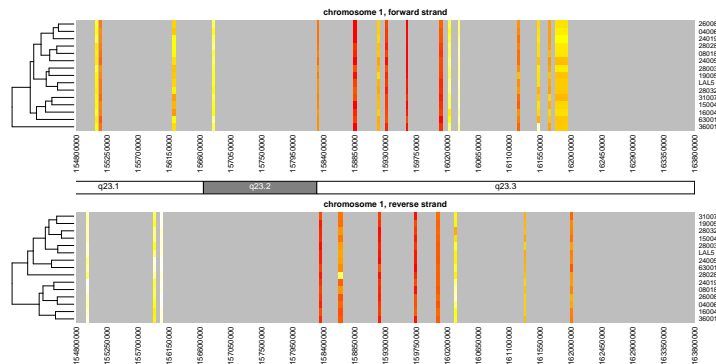
ChrMapPlot

Number of features plotted: 157



Chromosomes can be subsetted by cytoband or start/end coordinates along the chromosome. The following illustrates how one might plot the strands separately (this is the default behavior):

```
> plotmap<-plotChrMap(chrdata, 1, cytoband='q23', interval=50000, srtCyto=0, cexCyto=1.2)
```



Other options include subsetting of samples, adding a color key to indicate sample subsets, deactivating the sample-based clustering and so on. See the help pages for `plotChrMap` and `drawMapDendro` for details.

Note that the default colors provided by the `heat.colors` function are not especially attractive or informative; consider using custom-defined colors, for example by using the **RColorBrewer** package.

The output of the `plotChrMap` function can be subsequently used with the `grabChrMapProbes` function which enables the user to identify the probes or genes responsible for heatmap bands of interest.

Note that the `layout` and `par` options for the current graphics device are *not* reset following generation of the image. This is so that the `grabChrMapProbes` function can accurately identify the region of interest when the user interactively clicks on the diagram.

## 4 Interactive probe/gene identification

Often it will be of interest to determine exactly which probes or genes are shown to be up- or down-regulated by the `plotChrMap` heat map. This can be done using the `grabChrMapProbes` function. This takes the output of the `plotChrMap` function, asks the user to mouse-click the heatmap on either side of the bands of interest and returns a character vector of the locus identifiers in that region. These can then be passed to the **AnnotationDbi** function `mget` to identify which genes are being differentially expressed.

```
> probes <- grabChrMapProbes( plotmap )
> genes <- unlist(mget(probes, envir=hgu95av2SYMBOL, ifnotfound=NA))
```

Note that due to the way the expression values are plotted, genes which lie very close to each other on the chromosome may have been averaged to give a signal that could be usefully plotted at screen resolution. In such cases the locus identifiers will be returned concatenated, separated by semicolons (e.g. “37687\_i\_at;37688\_f\_at;37689\_s\_at”). Typically this is easily solved by zooming in on a region of interest, using either the “cytoband” or “start” and “end” options to `plotChrMap`. See also the “interval” option for another approach to this problem.

## 5 Session information

The version number of R and packages loaded for generating the vignette were:

```
R version 4.6.0 Patched (2026-04-24 r89963)
Platform: aarch64-apple-darwin23
Running under: macOS Tahoe 26.3.1
```

```
Matrix products: default
```

```
BLAS: /Library/Frameworks/R.framework/Versions/4.6/Resources/lib/libRblas.0.dylib
LAPACK: /Library/Frameworks/R.framework/Versions/4.6/Resources/lib/libRlapack.dylib; LAPACK
```

```
locale:
```

```
[1] C/en_US.UTF-8/en_US.UTF-8/C/en_US.UTF-8/en_US.UTF-8
```

```
time zone: America/New_York
```

```
tzcode source: internal
```

```
attached base packages:
```

```
[1] stats4      stats      graphics  grDevices  utils      datasets  methods  
[8] base
```

```
other attached packages:
```

```
[1] hgu95av2.db_3.13.0    org.Hs.eg.db_3.23.1  ChromHeatMap_1.66.0  
[4] annotate_1.90.0       XML_3.99-0.23        AnnotationDbi_1.74.0  
[7] IRanges_2.46.0        S4Vectors_0.50.0     ALL_1.53.0  
[10] Biobase_2.72.0        BiocGenerics_0.58.0  generics_0.1.4
```

```
loaded via a namespace (and not attached):
```

```
[1] SparseArray_1.12.0      bitops_1.0-9  
[3] RSQLite_2.4.6           lattice_0.22-9  
[5] grid_4.6.0             fastmap_1.2.0  
[7] blob_1.3.0             Matrix_1.7-5  
[9] cigarillo_1.2.0        restfulr_0.0.16  
[11] DBI_1.3.0              httr_1.4.8  
[13] Biostrings_2.80.0       codetools_0.2-20  
[15] abind_1.4-8            cli_3.6.6  
[17] rlang_1.2.0            crayon_1.5.3  
[19] XVector_0.52.0         bit64_4.8.0  
[21] cachem_1.1.0           DelayedArray_0.38.0  
[23] yaml_2.3.12            otel_0.2.0  
[25] S4Arrays_1.12.0        tools_4.6.0  
[27] parallel_4.6.0         BiocParallel_1.46.0  
[29] memoise_2.0.1          Rsamtools_2.28.0  
[31] SummarizedExperiment_1.42.0 curl_7.1.0  
[33] vctrs_0.7.3            R6_2.6.1  
[35] png_0.1-9             BiocIO_1.22.0  
[37] matrixStats_1.5.0      rtracklayer_1.72.0  
[39] KEGGREST_1.52.0        Seqinfo_1.2.0  
[41] bit_4.6.0             pkgconfig_2.0.3  
[43] GenomicRanges_1.64.0   GenomicAlignments_1.48.0  
[45] MatrixGenerics_1.24.0  xtable_1.8-8  
[47] rjson_0.2.23          compiler_4.6.0  
[49] RCurl_1.98-1.18
```