

## Aril Trek 2018

By Scarlett Ayres

The Aril Society International and the Mesilla Valley Iris Society of Region23 hosted the 2018 Aril Trek in Las Cruces, NM on April 6-7 in Las Cruces, NM. Seventy-five attendees traveled to southern New Mexico to traipse through 4 sunny gardens to view 2-year plantings of Arilbred irises. The attendees who came from all over the country were asked to choose their favorite Arilbreds. The five favorite irises chosen by the Aril Trek attendees are Sand Dancer, Refiner's Fire, Bold Awakening, Enchanter's Spell, OGB and Dubai. Best plus Arilbred (more than half aril heritage) was Dubai, OGB+. Best half Arilbred was a tie between Bold Awakening and Sand Dancer. Best minus Arilbred (less than half aril heritage) was Signal Butte. Remember a minus should have a least 2 Aril traits and a half or plus should have at least three.



Figure 1 Enchanter's Spell, AB, OGB, 2013 hybridized by Rick Tasco



*Figure 2 Sand Dancer, AB, OGB, 2010 hybridized by Rick Tasco*

Friday night we played the Aril Bingo game. It is a lot like regular Bingo except instead of pulling B3 or N47 we use a PowerPoint presentation coded to randomly pull Arilbred names which are in columns on cards that look a lot like standard bingo cards with a free center. The PowerPoint slides have the Arilbred name, picture and educational words. It is a good educational tool to expose people to Arilbred terminology and is fun to play. Of course, the winner received an Arilbred iris.

This was followed by a panel of hybridizers consisting of Tom Waters, Pete McGrath, Dell Perry and Rick Tasco. They started with a discussion about proposed terminology for Arilbred Dwarfs (ABD) and Arilbred Medians (ABM). Dell Perry said that the problem with just calling an iris an Arilbred is that you

have no clue about the height. The height can range the full gamut from MDBs to TBs. The terminology that has been endorsed by the Aril Society International (ASI) judges handbook committee will appear in an upcoming revision providing it has been approved by the AIS Board of Directors. The old terminology will be kept but if the height falls within 13-22 inches it is an ABM and if the Arilbred height is less than 13 inches it will be ABD. So, a designation may be something like ABM, RB as shown for Vera Ruby. Only these two categories will be used for the smaller Arilbreds. The 22-inch height was chosen (and not the minimum height of 27.5 inch for TBs) so that most small Arilbreds with dwarf or medians in the ancestry will be ABMs or ABDs.



*Figure 3 Vera Ruby would be known as an ABM RB under a proposal being considered by the ASI*

The discussion turned to what is the difference between signals that is found on the Arils and Arilbreds and color spots that are found on SDBs and *I. pumilae*. In Arilbred signals, the cells making up the signal are physically raised from the surrounding petal as seen in New Vision. It feels like velvet. Also, how the signal reflects light is different from a color spot. The signal almost fluoresces and could look different from extreme angles. A pumila spot is not raised. Rick Tasco said he crossing SDBs with OGBs and is trying to get the bright signals. Pete McGrath mentioned the beautiful Arilbred irises created by

the legendary Howard Shockey who was known for his bright signals on a clear background like Persian Padishaw. McGrath is working on clean veins.



*Figure 4 New Vision, AB OGB, 2012 hybridized by Rick Tasco showing the raised signal that feels like velvet*



*Figure 5 Persian Padishah, AB, OGB, 1987 hybridized by Howard Shockey*

We went to four gardens on Saturday. The four gardens represent the four compass quadrants of the city. First, off the two busses went to Bob and Jacquie Pountney's garden in southern Mesilla Valley, then to the west mesa to Howie Dash and Lily Rawlyk's garden, then north in the Mesilla Valley to Cynthia and Wes Wilson garden called Iris Inspire Us® on their pecan farm and lastly to my garden on the east mesa. The soils of the valley are very different than the soils of the east and west mesa but the

Arilbreds grew well in all garden locations.



*Figure 6 Jacquie Pountney in her terraced Arilbred garden*

Pete McGrath was the speaker for Saturday banquet. His program was entitled to “Affinity and Beyond”. Originally, he was the type of gardener who said “If you can’t eat it, then why grow it?” However that changed when he saw the Arilbred Iris Oyez. He discussed how he grows Arils in Albuquerque, NM. He said that you almost “never see a pure Aril” and “Aril irises grow in spite of the weather and not because of it.” Arils are difficult to grow even in New Mexico because they want a dry summer. Rain may make them rot and half our rain occurs late summer. I was very much interested in what he had to say, because the few Arils I tried did not make it. I put them in the back of the property in raised beds with sand and put garden art in front to prevent overspray from sprinklers. It didn’t work. Pete makes a cover using PVC hoops and clear plastic to keep the rain off in the summer. The plastic goes only part of the way to the ground to allow for air ventilation. The hoops are not used in the spring time.



*Figure 7 Gideon's Lamp, AB OGB hybridized by Pete McGrath*

McGrath calls hybrids made with only Arils (no bearded cross) as the irises that do not last. Many of these irises are no longer with us but their progeny is. He lost 50% of his pure arils after the great freeze of 2011. In Las Cruces, the temperature stayed below 32°F for four straight days and dropped below -10°F one night. This was unheard of. It always, always gets above freezing during the day. McGrath started out with 70-80 of Shockey's irises after his death but have lost most. This was too bad because there were irises with orange signals, hot pink signals and bright red signals. Shockey told him when he started hybridizing to expect few takes, few seeds and few germinations. It hasn't stopped him. His quest for life is clear veining Arilbreds. Plus he also wants those fantastic signals. The signals on today's minuses are now better than the signals on the half-Arils when he first started.



*Figure 8 The Wilson's Arilbred garden in full bloom*

The future president of the ASI Howie Dash won Best Seedling at the Aril Trek for his seedling ADG 15-07-05. He told me that he puts his pure Arils in pots and puts them in a greenhouse in the summer where they can remain happily dry. He puts them outside in the spring and water them normally. So if you want to grow pure Arils, expect losses but persevere. Contact people who have been successful in growing pure Arils and find out their secrets. They are worth it. It was stressed that though Arils can be hard to grow, Arilbreds are growing throughout the United States. Heart of Hearts did very well in Des Moines, Iowa. It was suggested that people start with the minuses (less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  Aril content) and work their way up to the pluses (more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  Aril content). Then go for the big challenge: growing pure Arils. Along the way, make some crosses.





*Figure 9 Future ASI president Howie Dash won Best Seedling at the Aril Trek for ADG 15-07-05*



*Figure 10 One of Howie Dash AB seedlings ADG 16\_09\_06*