

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910137633203321
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Titolo	Exploring the legacy of the 1948 Arnhem Land Expedition // edited by Martin Thomas and Margo Neale
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Canberra, : ANU Press, 2011 Canberra, Australia : , : ANU Press, , [2011] ©2011
ISBN	1-921666-45-5
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (488 pages) : illustrations
Disciplina	305.8991
Soggetti	Discoveries in geography Aboriginal Australians Arnhem Land (N.T.)
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references.
Nota di contenuto	Preliminary pages; Foreword; Prologue; Acknowledgments; 1. Expedition as Time Capsule: Introducing the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land. Martin Thomas; Part I. Engagements with Aboriginal Cultures; 2. Inside Mountford's Tent: Paint, politics and paperwork. Philip Jones; 3. Nation Building or Cold War: Political settings for the Arnhem Land Expedition. Kim Beazley; 4. A Robinson Crusoe in Arnhem Land: Howell Walker, National Geographic and the Arnhem Land Expedition of 1948. Mark Collins Jenkins 5. Birds on the Wire: Wild sound, informal speech and the emergence of the radio documentary. Tony MacGregor 6. From Kunnanj, Fish Creek, to Mumeka, Mann River: Hunter-gatherer tradition and transformation in Western Arnhem Land, 1948-2009. Jon Altman; 7. Making a Sea Change: Rock art, archaeology and the enduring legacy of Frederick McCarthy's research on Groote Eylandt. Anne Clarke and Ursula Frederick; 8. Ecology and the Arnhem Land Expedition: Raymond Specht, a botanist in the field. Lynne McCarthy 9. Piecing the History Together: An overview of the 1948 Arnhem Land Expedition. Sally K. May Part II. Collectors and Collections; 10. The

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In 1948 a collection of scientists, anthropologists and photographers journeyed to northern Australia for a seven-month tour of research and discovery - now regarded as 'the last of the big expeditions'. The American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land was front-page news at the time, but 60 years later it is virtually unknown. This lapse into obscurity was due partly to the fraught politics of Australian anthropology and animus towards its leader, the Adelaide-based writer-photographer Charles Mountford. Promoted as a 'friendly mission that would foster good relations between Australia and its most powerful wartime ally, the Expedition was sponsored by National Geographic, the Smithsonian Institution and the Australian Government. An unlikely cocktail of science, diplomacy and popular geography, the Arnhem Land Expedition put the Aboriginal cultures of the vast Arnhem Land reserve on an international stage.

2. Record Nr.	UNISANNIONAP0426820			
Autore	Levi-Civita, Tullio			
Titolo	Parte 1: Cinematica, principi e statica / Tullio Levi-Civita e Ugo Amaldi			
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Bologna, : Zanichelli, stampa 1991			
Edizione	[2. ed. riv]			
Descrizione fisica	XII, 423 p. ; 23 cm.			
Altri autori (Persone)	Amaldi, Ugo <1875-1957>			
Collocazione	SALA DING 531	LEV.co01	SALA DING 531	LEV.
Lingua di pubblicazione	Italiano			
Formato	Materiale a stampa			
Livello bibliografico	Monografia			