



## ANZAAB *Aspects of Book Collecting*

**Ion Idriess**

Burnet's Books

**Background:** Ion Llewellyn Idriess (1889-1979) led an amazingly varied life, as an assayer, opal miner, prospector, timber-getter, Light Horseman, sniper, and writer. He spent time in Cape York, Torres Strait, New Guinea, Northern Territory, central Australia, Western Australia. He often travelled and worked with Aborigines, for whom he had a fine regard. He was a storyteller with an optimistic view of Australia's development.

**Range:** Idriess wrote 52 books, the subjects reflecting the diversity of his interests and experience. His first book, *Madman's Island*, appeared in 1927, originally in a fictionalised form which was a commercial failure. Some of his books describe Australian legends (*Lasseter's Last Ride*, *Flynn of the Inland*, *The Cattle King*); others combine the style of a bush yarn with historical and geographical subjects. Some are technical books for prospectors and miners (*Prospecting for Gold*, *Cyaniding for Gold*, *Fortunes in Minerals*). The Guerrilla series of six small books was published during the Second World War. Many of his books describe Aboriginal bush skills and history, and two of his later works (*Our Living Stone Age*, *Our Stone Age Mystery*) reflect his interest in Aboriginal anthropology. Idriess was a relentless contributor to the "Aboriginalities" page of *The Bulletin*, and many of his stories appeared in magazines such as *Walkabout*, *Man*, *Salt*, *Jest*. His first published piece was "Opal Mining at Lightning Ridge in *The Sydney Mail*, 1910.

**Availability:** Most bookshops will have a selection of titles by Idriess, who is still probably the biggest selling Australian author. All titles are now hard to find in first edition, some notoriously so: *Madman's Island* and *Cyaniding for Gold* seldom come on the market, though both are now available in facsimile. Most titles were reprinted, some up to 40 or 50 times, so reading copies of his narrative books are fairly readily available. Serious collectors will look for early printings in fine condition with dust wrapper. Inscribed and signed copies, though not uncommon, are sought after. Several collections were published in uniform bindings: The National Edition (1938-39 in cloth or half morocco, and 1941) contained 12 titles; The Frontier Edition originally appeared as a boxed set of 18 volumes in 1951, and 6 later titles were subsequently issued in the same binding. Discovery Press did an 8-volume set of The Best of Idriess (1973), and Angus & Robertson issued 6 titles in a 2-volume set of Greatest Stories in 1986.

**Price-range:** A fine first edition of *Madman's Island* in original dust wrapper might cost \$3,000, as would a similar copy of *Cyaniding*. Most titles in first edition will be \$200 or more. The Guerrilla series sell for \$500-\$1,000 each. Later printings of most titles can be found for \$50-\$100

**Footnote:** Beware of reproduction dust wrappers, and later printings described as first edition. *An Idriess Bibliography*, published by Australian Book Collector, is a useful reference.