

CX 14 Books

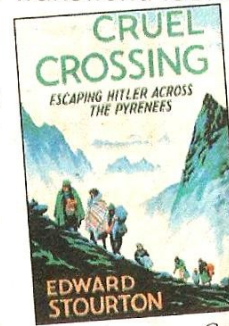
Cruel Crossing Edward Stourton £20 Transworld ISBN: 978-0-857-52051-7

THERE are so many untold tales of the Second World War that this risks being just another back-story that is worthy but dull, telling a tale so it is mentioned for posterity - but this is so not that.

Evoking heroism, endurance and the ultimately mundane terror of evading the Nazis, Stourton tells of the people who helped thousands escape from Occupied France and the stories of the escapers.

This month marks the 20th anniversary of the *Chemin de la Liberté* (The Freedom Trail), see the *Back Page*, and Stourton tells of his efforts to complete the five-day walk in the footsteps of the 33,000 who had gone before him.

However, his trek is not the topic of the book: it gives it a pur-



pose - and the purpose is to recount the stories of various participants. The chapter headings giving a clue to the very different circumstances of each: Jeanne, Jews and the Camps; Françoise and the Americans; Tales of Children etc. The Freedom Trail was just one of many escape trails out of France but, heading from Saint-Girons in Ariège to Estèrri d'Aneu in neutral Spain, it was one of the highest-level routes and one of the hardest.

It was used by thousands of French people fleeing to escape being deported to slave labour camps, by thousands of Allied servicemen who had escaped the

Germans and been helped by the Resistance and by hundreds of Allied secret agents and *passeurs* who guided them to safety.

This is a compelling series of tales.