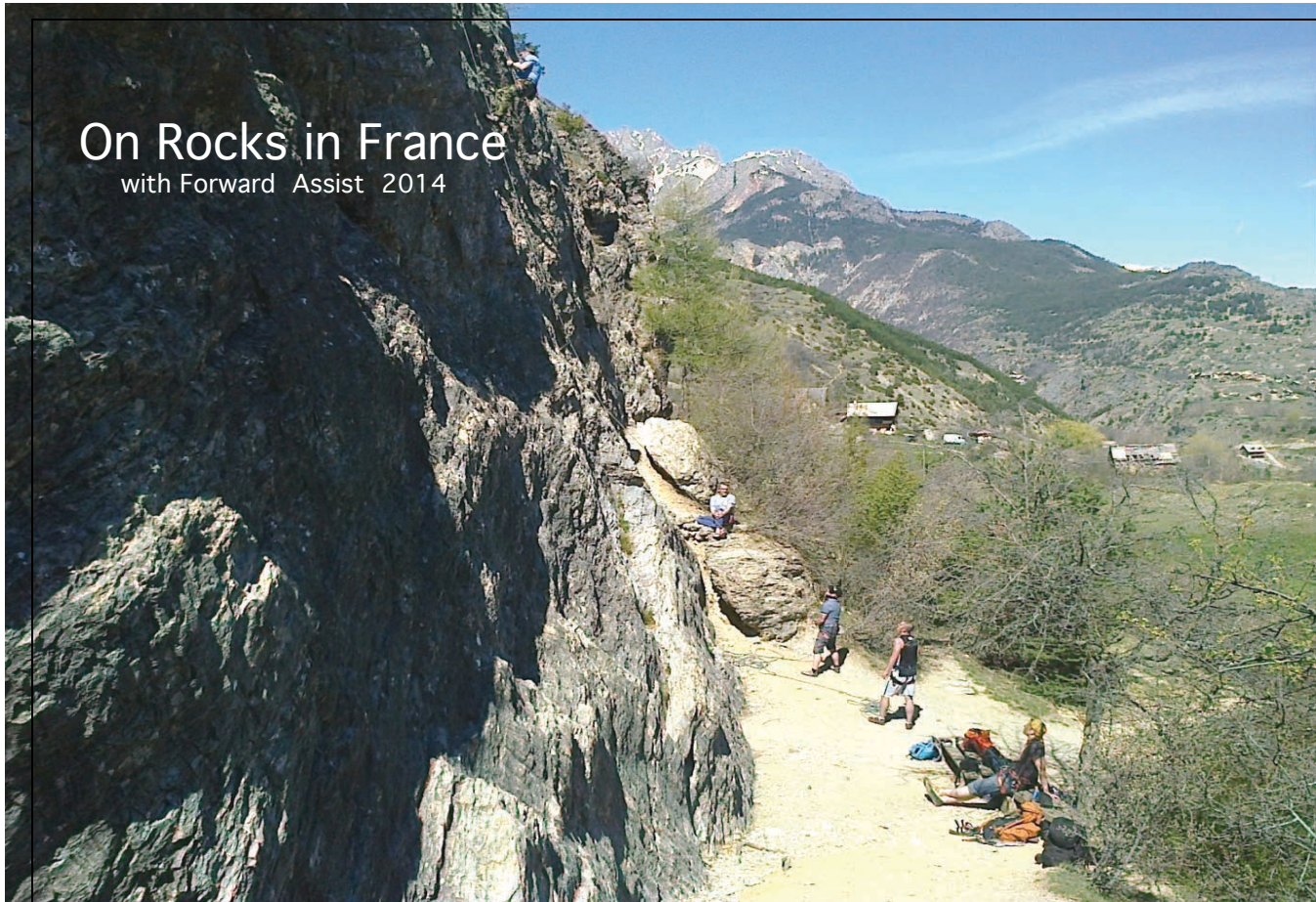


# On Rocks in France

with Forward Assist 2014



Precious diamonds lay scattered over the stony ground. To the untrained eye they looked like pebbles. They were so common in a place called Marange, in the bush of Zimbabwe in 2005, that local children were using them in their catapults to shoot birds. Unaware it was the world's richest diamond field. A tragic true tale of the ignorant overlooking the treasure they possessed right underfoot.

This story came to mind as I spent a week in France with ex servicemen with Forward Assist. A few of the many thousands of rough diamonds, once used, now abandoned. Discarded 'missiles'. It is the greatest need in a human to be valued, and this is the key factor to their wasted talent. How many lie unemployed, also punished with the debilitating effects of post traumatic stress which they have acquired serving others? A loss of trust and motivation is an inevitable outcome.

I was deeply moved witnessing the healing methods of Tony through Forward Assist; in this trip he used rock climbing as an aid. It was therapy at its most effective, delivered on the men's wavelength, in their language. No labels or stigmas or dependence attached.

As one man put it, beaming with joie de vivre after a few days, said with heartfelt sincerity, 'it has been the best experience, as I have learnt I can trust myself, it is up to me..'. He openly stated his gratitude and respect for the input he had received. He had gained self respect, confidence and sense of responsibility.





This same man when I first met him, came across as a furtive socially insecure person, and had been shaking uncontrollably even on a small safe rock climb the first day. Four days later he was the life and soul of the group, and calmly leading intimidating climbs with enthusiasm. Totally engaging. Another had a turn around attitude in self motivation. I for one have never laughed so much thanks to Tony's contagious sense of humour, and laughter being the best medicine; it was a time of rejuvenation on many levels.



By the end of the week, they so impressed me with their strong camaraderie, ability to push themselves to their limit and respectfully work cohesively together to an end goal. All great qualities.

The man at the top of this climb is 68 years old. A great grandfather and a great example to follow.

What business wouldn't want a workforce that jumped immediately to carry out instructions to produce quickly and efficiently? The training in the armed forces seems ideal for economic growth in civilian life, yet many ex servicemen are lost and unemployed when they could be a motivating force for good practice and productivity.

Tony Wright is inspirational in his effectiveness in bringing a sense of value and self worth and motivation back to these people. His big hearted personality exudes common sense and he 'gets' the needs of these scattered treasures. I was deeply touched by the experience of seeing precious personalities picked up, each with above average qualities being revealed through the week of 'polishing' by Forward Assist.

