



One of two spans (with an island in between) of Partners' recent footbridge across the Blue Nile

Partners in the Horn of Africa

is addressing the problems of Ethiopia and follows two important principles:

- *100% of all donations go directly into projects in Ethiopia. Our Board members work voluntarily and cover all operating costs.*
- *Each project has an Ethiopian "partner" who contributes 15-20% of the project cost, usually in the form of labour.*

The Bridge over the River Nile

The Blue Nile and the White Nile converge in Khartoum, Sudan, before flowing north into Egypt. The Blue Nile starts in Ethiopia and provides 85% of the flow to the Nile proper. In Ethiopia the Blue Nile (or "Abay", as it is called) is both a blessing and a curse. It brings water for farming and irrigation but also brings malaria and isolates communities for months each year when it and its tributaries are too deep and dangerous to cross.

This February **Partners** completed our fourteenth footbridge, this one across the Blue Nile. It is far and away our most ambitious bridge project to date. In a remote area, 26 kilometres from any road, the bridge will be used by 250,000 people. The bridge consists of two steel spans, one 46 metres in length, the other 48 metres with an island in between (a happy accident of geography allowing us to span a river too wide for a single span). Because neither power nor heavy machinery was available at the site all the work was done manually. Twelve 8 metre steel sections were carried to the site and lifted into place by men



Without power, cement pillars are hand poured, a metre at a time



Without machines cement must be carried to the site

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climbing wood scaffolding and holding the sections in place for the welders. Three massive concrete pillars in each channel on either side of the island provide the support for the bridge segments. During the construction, each side of the river was temporarily dammed with 200 pound sandbags to allow for the construction of the concrete pillars.

Why Bridges?

Crossing rivers is an inescapable fact of life in Ethiopia. About 90% of the population live in the "Highlands", a mountainous area crisscrossed by numerous rivers, many of which drain into the Blue Nile. Most of these rivers are easily crossed during the dry season but become impassable during the rainy season from June through September. Yet this does not prevent people from trying to cross, for a variety of reasons. They may be seeking medical care, trying to reach the market to sell their crops or pick up supplies, or simply trying to get to school.

Every year deaths by drowning are an unfortunate but common occurrence. Bridges not only save lives, they give communities year round access to all available services

Two criteria are always considered in the decision to build a bridge. First we want to know how many people will use the bridge and second how many deaths per year will be prevented by building the bridge. Small rivers have an average of 5 - 15 drownings per year. Last year alone 38 people were swept away as they attempted to cross the Blue Nile at the site of our most recent bridge...an important consideration in the decision to take on this project.



**Rivers can be deadly
in the rainy season**

**A dangerous proposition -
children crossing the Blue Nile in low water
(photo by Chantel Snyder)**



**Some of the crowd of 10,000 who
gathered to celebrate the bridge opening,
including police who walked 26 km in the
morning to help with the crowd and then
26 km at the end of the day to get home**



Partners has come a long way since our first footbridge was built in Agarfa in 2001. Quality and design have improved and the number of bridge projects has grown.

Because **Partners** requires the community to contribute at least 15 - 20% of the cost of a project, the local population provided much of the material and almost all of the labour at the Blue Nile bridge. Between 200 and 400 men worked every day over a period of about six months, hauling rocks, building scaffolding, mixing concrete, building concrete foundations and pillars and setting the bridge sections in place.

This bridge cost **Partners** \$95,000, a fraction of what it would cost in Canada.

The number of people who attended the opening ceremonies is a testament to the welcome change that this bridge has brought to the surrounding communities. On February 19, 2012, more than 10,000 men, women and children walked to the site (the footbridge is 26 kms. from the nearest road) to attend the celebrations, including a feast and entertainment. Speeches were made by local dignitaries and a ribbon cutting preceded the first crossing. Inauguration festivities often include mock celebrations with guns where the theme is self-congratulatory for having conquered the adversary. In this case the river, responsible for taking the lives of so many community members was finally conquered with the building of the bridge.

Approximately 250,000 people will now have safe, year-round access to health care, education, markets and other services not available in their isolated communities.

Good, Better, Best



Partners' 1st Bridge, Agarfa (2001)



Partners' Shalo River Bridge (2007)



Partners' Blue Nile Bridge (2012)



Young dancers entertaining the crowd on Inauguration Day



A Bridge Worth Celebrating! Left to right, Yehalem Metiku (Country Representative), Dave Cosco (Director), Ato Lake (key Ethiopian supporter of the bridge) and John Baigent (Executive Director)



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Our mission is to improve the lives of Ethiopians. We listen to their needs and partner with them on projects that empower communities and individuals and contribute to their well being.

Our Board of Directors

- John Baigent
- Mekonen Bayssie
- Kirsten Behler
- Patricia Blocksom
- David Cosco
- Marguerite Jackson
- Rebecca Maurer
- John McAlpine
- Vince Ready
- Brooke Sundin

Moving? Please let us know your new address so we can keep in touch.

Email? Let us know if you prefer to receive your Newsletter by email.

Your donations are making a difference in the lives of many Ethiopians. On their behalf, we thank you.

We are a recognized Canadian charity and issue tax receipts for all donations.

Other Partners' Projects in 2012

Partners in the Horn of Africa will take on approximately 60 projects this year in Ethiopia. These will include,

- Group Homes where orphan girls can live safely while attending high school and university
- Building approximately 20 wells and protected springs in an area where only 26% of the population has access to clean water
- Constructing 15 school buildings (libraries and classroom blocks)
- A major irrigation project bringing income stability to marginalized farmers
- A multi year reforestation program planting 900,000 trees
- Upgrading teacher skills at the elementary school level
- Using women in micro finance programs to fabricate and distribute washable, reusable sanitary pads to rural school girls

**"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."
- Margaret Mead**

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