



BOTH BY JOE KEENE

Reader Fixes an African Bridge

Photo inspires Ethiopian rebuilding project

Ken Frantz decided to fix an Ethiopian bridge because, he says, "I'm a boy, and boys love bridges." Happily, this "boy" owns a construction company.

Ken, 52, was waiting for mechanics to service a truck in his hometown of Gloucester, Virginia, when he picked up the December 2000 *GEOGRAPHIC*. He saw a photo of Ethiopians being hauled on a rope across the Blue Nile—a 360-year-old bridge there had been destroyed during the Italian occupation of 1935-1941. "I looked at the photo once, twice, three times," Ken recalls, "and it came to me: What I want to do is repair that bridge."

Ken helped launch Bridges to Prosperity, dedicated to building



bridges to help create wealth in developing nations. The group surveyed the site (top), won backing from tribal elders, and chose a lightweight steel design. Donkeys toiled in 25,000 pounds of supplies, and Ken, his crew, and Ethiopian volunteers rebuilt the bridge (above) in ten days at a cost of \$108,000, largely donated

by the organization's founders. "Half a million people live near the bridge," he says. "Now they can trade, get to hospitals and schools on the other side, and see family members they haven't seen for years." Ken's group has also built cableways in Nepal, a suspension bridge in Indonesia, and a second Ethiopian bridge.