









# FINISHED

August 2006

Look what we've managed to do together! And when I say we I mean you, me and the people of Prasat Char village. At last, after many days of hard work for all concerned the bridge is finally finished, and just in time too. The water underneath had started to rise and was already knee deep.

I'd like to thank all of you who helped make this bridge a reality, without your financial support the people of Prasat Char Village would still only have the option of crossing via the two or three planks that served as the old bridge.

 <p>The approaches to the bridge nearing completion.</p>	 <p>At last, vehicles can now cross.</p>	 <p>Thanks to your help we've gone from this.....</p>  <p>to this.</p>
 <p>For the last couple of weeks we paid the villagers with rice. This guy is transporting 375kg of rice out to the bridge for us.</p>	 <p>Carrying a 50 kg bag of rice over the old bridge would have been a lot more challenging than it is now.</p>	 <p>The finishing touches - our sign goes up.</p>
 <p>* The wording that is on the sign is written below.</p>	 <p>Time to celebrate!</p>	 <p>An added bonus is that the villagers have almost finished the road into the village.</p>

\* THE SIGN SAYS: "This bridge was build in 2006 by the people of Prasat Char Village and Helping Hands NGO. It is named after Brian and Jennifer Swift and family, from Queensland , Australia , whose very generous donation mad eit possible to build the bridge.

It was also made possible by the donations of other generous individuals around the world."

4 August 2006

## PARTY TIME!

I was particularly keen to hold an opening ceremony to celebrate the new bridge as I felt it would be a way to make the villagers proud of the bridge and proud of their achievement (after all they did do all the work on it).

Brian from Australia (always trust an Aussie to organise the drinks for a party) and Sophan and her family from Phnom Penh helped organise the opening ceremony. The District Governor was in attendance as were as the Commune Leaders and Village Leaders from either side of the bridge. We also invited other aid organisations to join us. We even managed to get one of the TV stations to attend and our bridge and opening ceremony made it onto the news.

 <p>We expected 200 villagers to attend the opening ceremony but <i>at least</i> 600 turned up. They were from the two villages on either side of the bridge.</p>	 <p>A view of our completed bridge.</p>	 <p>The Commune Leader gives a speech.</p>
 <p>Chanti translating during my speech.</p>  <p>We even managed to get one of the TV stations to cover the event.</p>	 <p>The District Governor giving a speech. Note the large blue blow up kangaroo - a must at any opening ceremony! (Thanks Graham.)</p>	 <p>Cutting the ribbon. An exciting and proud moment for all involved.</p>
 <p>The "VIP's" at the opening ceremony.</p>	 <p>Happy customers!</p>	 <p>My Cambodian sister, Sowana, and I. Sowana often says that hand in hand we can work together to help the poor.</p>

With so many of the villagers in attendance I took the opportunity of using my speech to get my message across to the villagers; i.e. we are not here just to "give you things" but to help you help yourselves.

With the help of my right hand man, Chanti, I think they understood my message. Unfortunately, many Cambodian's often just see us as rich gift givers and I work hard to make sure they understand that we don't want to treat them like children and just give hand outs, rather we want to help them become independent, self-sufficient individuals.

I'll admit, from my own personal point of view building the bridge was a frustrating and stressful project and we encountered many "hassles" along the way, which don't need to be elaborated on, but was it worth it? ABSOLUTELY! And for so many reasons. Apart from the obvious reason of giving people a safe way in and out of their village, the bridge building project has brought together the villagers from either side of the bridge; it injected money into the village economy via the wages we paid; people learnt skills they can use elsewhere; Matt, Graham and myself learnt many things; people from around the globe saw that their donated money can make a tangible difference; and I still think the most exciting thing is that it motivated the villagers to build the road between the village and the bridge.

So now what? Well, I'm heading down to the beach to get a few days rest. The last couple of months have been rewarding but exhausting.

Thank you again, each and every one of you that helped make this bridge a reality.