

## Hutt fair will help Books for Cambodia

**Under Pol Pot, a generation of Cambodians went without books. There were no schools and reading material was often burned.**

Now lack of money means today's children of that generation also miss out. That's why we're holding a book fair on Saturday, 9 August in support of NZ's 'Books for Cambodia Trust'. We need your help.

Jennie Wilson has seen for herself how eager children in the Takeo province of Cambodia are to delve into the pages of books. She's been a foreigner hovering over them with a camera, "but they barely look up, they're so engrossed in reading".

The trouble is, at the 3,000-pupil Moy U Sophea school just south of Phnom Penh and the nearby 600-pupil Kla Krohim junior school, there aren't many books they can read.

The Cambodian government will fund text books, but in this developing country still rebuilding after the ravages of the Khmer Rouge regime, there's not enough money to stock libraries.

That's why Jennie, husband Roger and other New Zealanders who have helped with aid projects in this part of the world, launched the registered charitable trust *Books for Cambodia* last year.

Jennie, an early childhood and primary school teacher, and Roger, a community development specialist, have racked up a total of four years of work in Cambodia with New Zealand's Volunteer Services Abroad (VSA) and a Dutch NGO equivalent.

With their daughter Rachel and her partner Scott, they now run Gecko Trails, offering New Zealanders a different kind of travel experience. On trips planned in conjunction with VSA, about a dozen kiwis at a time go on 'Adventures', getting a real taste of life in Cambodia by staying with villagers, and giving something back by working on community projects. Of course, there's time to see some of the tourist highlights as well.

Previous 'adventurers' have helped schools in the Takeo area by building library shelves and establishing library systems, painting, fence-building and getting recycling and gardening schemes up and running. Jennie says the focus of the *Books for Cambodia* Trust is to put fiction and non-fiction literature on those shelves - written in Cambodian and at one bi-lingual school, Cambodian and English.

In Pol Pot's time there were no schools; books were burned. Cambodia's publishing industry is only now starting to recover, and when money from the West flows in, that's a real boost to local authors and publishers. Jennie says with books costing around \$NZ3 at markets there, the \$8,000-\$9,000 already raised by the trust has gone a long way.

"Since word had got out about what we're doing, there has been a lot of interest from other schools. There are 14 high schools in the district where we are working."

New Zealand donations are also paying for training of school librarians there.

Because everyone on the trust gives their time as volunteers, Jennie says every cent raised here goes on buying books or training librarians in Cambodia.