

The Remarkable Reti

by Kiwa Hammond
and Duane Culshaw



At Mōhaka, on a summer's day, you'll find all kinds of people hoping to catch fresh fish. Some use surf-casting rods. A few use **kontiki**. And occasionally, at the river mouth, you might see a local with a strange-looking contraption that slices through the water like a shark's fin. At first glance, it looks like the person is playing with some kind of toy. But look closer, and you'll realise they too are fishing. They are using an ingenious device known as a reti.

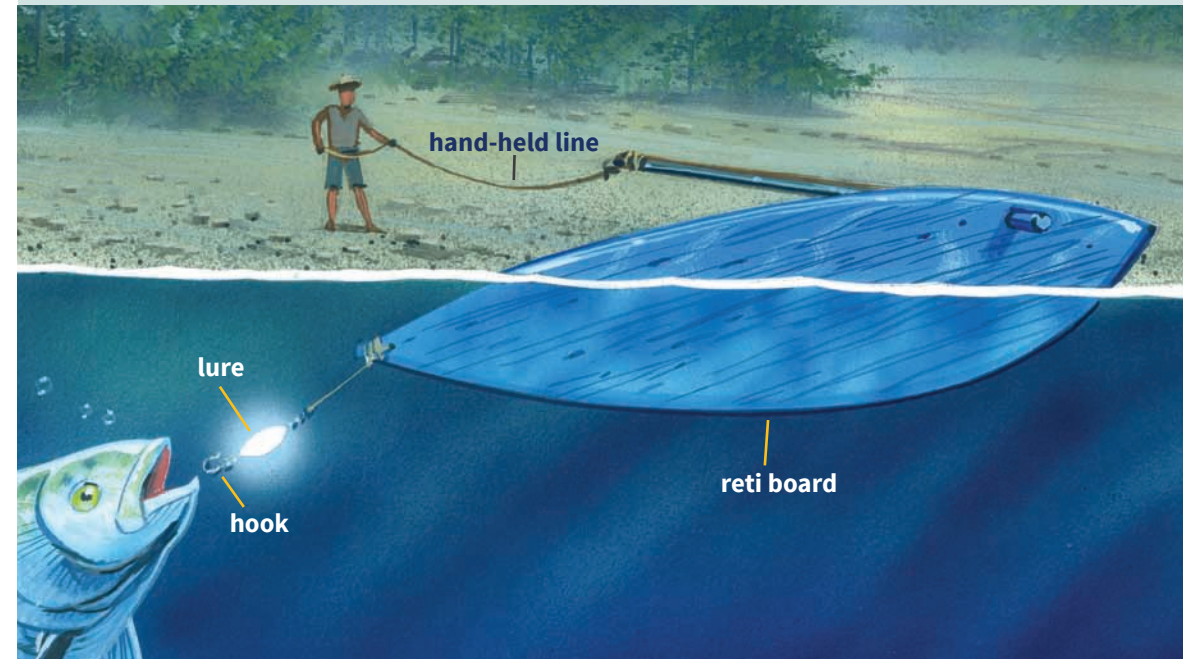
A Way of Life

For Ngāti Pāhauwera, fishing with a reti is a way of life. The tradition has been passed down through generations, though it's hard to say exactly when reti were first used. Some people say their origin can be traced back to pre-European times, maybe even to Polynesia, where fish were caught from outrigger canoes using a fishing line and a **lure**.

But what exactly is a reti?

A reti is a fishing device controlled from shore by a hand-held line. The reti board is designed to move against the current, dragging a lure and hook. This board looks like an oddly shaped skateboard with no wheels – or perhaps a surfboard for a small dog. Some people say reti boards resemble fish, like kahawai or tāmure (snapper).

Although reti look unusual, they should never be underestimated. They are specially designed to catch kahawai and other predatory fish that swim in the Mōhaka River. This unique design is essential. As all successful fishers understand, no fish species is the same. They live in different habitats and eat different things, and this means they need to be caught in different ways.





1. kahawai (noun)
Arripis trutta: an edible greenish-blue to silvery-white coastal fish that has dark spotted markings, an elongated body, and a high front **dorsal fin**.

Know Your Fish

Colin Culshaw is a Ngāti Pāhauwera kaumātua. He has lived near the Mōhaka River for most of his life. Colin agrees that it's important to know about the fish in your rohe (territory).

“You definitely want to know what you're after and the best way to catch it,” Colin says. “Take kahawai, for example. Because they're predators, they stay near the surface chasing smaller fish. This is why reti have lures. They look like small fish shimmering in the water, and this catches the attention of the kahawai. We don't even need to use bait.”

Colin remembers his aunties using the reti at the mouth of the Mōhaka River, and his older sister Hazel was “quite the expert”. Given his family's long association with the reti, Colin is often quizzed about them. “People are fascinated,” he says. “I've even seen visitors from overseas try to replicate one, but they always fail.”



A Taonga

According to Colin, there is a secret to making a good reti and knowing how to use it. But it's not a secret he's willing to share with just anyone. Colin's adamant that the mana of the reti belongs to his iwi, Ngāti Pāhauwera. And people already recognise this. “I once made a reti for my niece in the South Island,” Colin says. “She took it to a nearby river to give it a go, and before long, all the locals out fishing were drawn to this strange sight. One of them yelled out that she must be from Mōhaka!”

At Mōhaka School, the staff and students regularly have fishing lessons. Colin teaches them about the cultural significance of the reti, and this includes learning the history, stories, and waiata. “To Ngāti Pāhauwera, the reti is a taonga – an important treasure,” he says. “The children understand this, and they take huge pride in learning about them.”

Colin has taught all his mokopuna how to use the reti, and he always encourages them to take the lead when he's demonstrating how it works. Colin believes this will help his mokopuna retain the knowledge and teachings of the reti. One day, he hopes they too will pass this tikanga on.



The Real Learning

Over the years, schoolchildren from all around Te Wairoa district have travelled to Mōhaka to learn the tikanga of the reti and how to use it. “One time,” Colin recalls, “we had almost forty reti in the river all at once. It was a wonderful sight to see.”

Colin believes that you can only talk about the reti for so long. He says that the real learning comes from going down to the river and experiencing the fishing first hand. He always smiles when he sees how much people admire the simplicity of the reti and how it works. “It’s a different way of catching fish,” he says, “but it brings hours of enjoyment.”

And sometimes, fishing really does involve hours. “Even if you’re using a reti, there’s no guarantee of landing a kahawai,” Colin says. “That’s why it’s called fishing – not catching,” he teases.

Glossary

- dorsal fin:** the fin on a fish’s back
- kontiki:** a small craft used for fishing from the shore
- lure:** an object that is designed to attract a fish

The late Ramon Joe, also a Ngāti Pāhauwera kaumātua, composed this waiata about the reti. He was taught how to use the reti by his koro.

*Kei te rere tāku reti
Kei te piupiu ngā pāua e rua
Ko tētahi he kāmuramura
Tētahi he waitutu e*

*Kei hea rā koe e kahawai?
Kei te whanga au ki a koe
Ko te Maungatea ki Ahimanawa
Ko te Aramoana ki Mōhaka*

*Mehemea kāore koe e haere mai
Me kōrero koe ki ngā ngaru
Mā ngaru e kōrero mai ki ahau
Ka whakakīngia e au tāku pēke
te wahie*

*My reti is afloat
The two pāua are spinning
One is the red shell spinner
One is the blue shell spinner*

*Where are you, oh kahawai?
I am at the mouth, waiting for you
From Maungatea in Ahimanawa (Māhia)
Along the sea path to Mōhaka*

*If you are not coming
You should tell the waves
And the waves will tell me
I will then have to fill my bag
with firewood*



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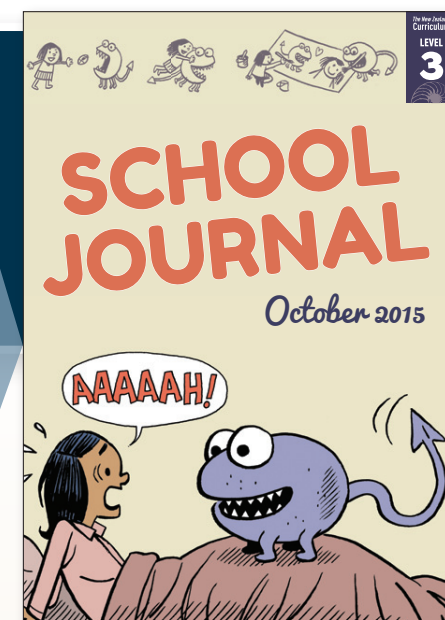
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