

RIVER

Paemanu

Artist Tahi: So _____ tell me about your river:

Artist Rua: Hmm... That's a hard one. When I think about river and the concept of, I suppose, identification, which is what I think you're asking, it's difficult for me to use just the one river. Of course river is whakapapa, and can be the ancestor that it was named for or the connection to whakapapa through story that it was named after.

Tahi: Ok let me be a bit more specific. You have a connection to kai. Tell me about the river that tells that story about your connection to kai.

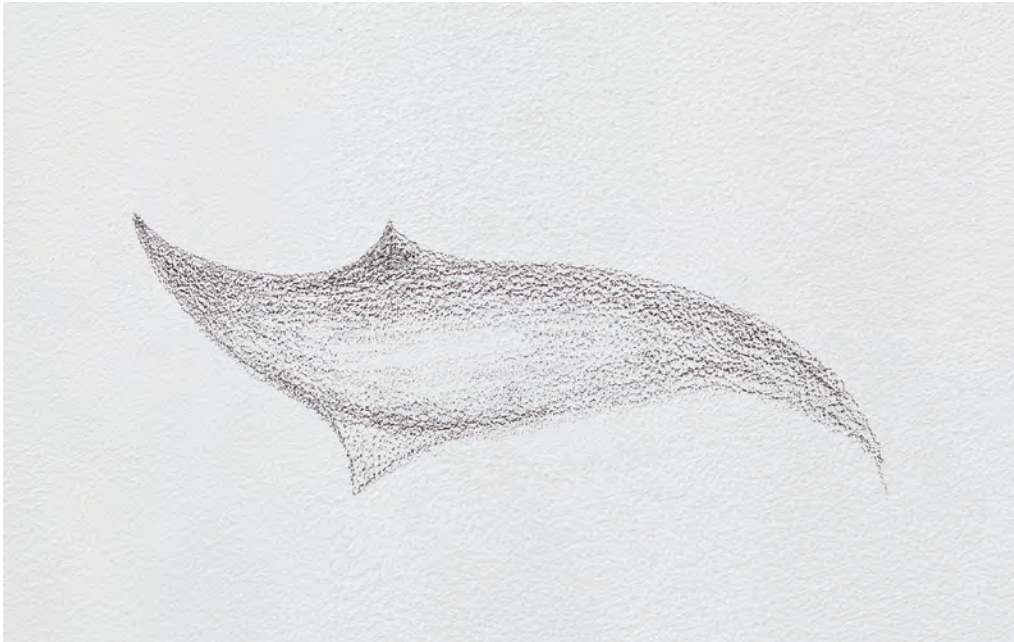
Rua: In that case I would have to go to, not a mighty flowing river, but to a creek on our Titi Island. It's a creek that flows through our manu, and comes out into the cove. It's not a big creek, and thinking about it, it is not one that provides us with copious amounts of food, there are Freshwater crayfish but not a major food source. However, growing up with the annual trip down to the islands for the season, back in the day, it was one of the first sights and the first noises that we heard before touching the whenua. Back when I was a boy the trip to the island was special because we usually went down as a whānau: my Poua, Mum Uncles, Aunties cousins, all on the same boat. We left on the tide, usually say, you know, around midnight and the trip took about 8 hours. Going through the seas, through the Straits, down the west side of Rakiura, there were some very treacherous waters, they say some of the roughest water in the world! And we would get sick as eh! On the real rough trips, we get crook just coming out of Riverton, so 7 or 8 hours of seasickness, and there's no escaping that! But we knew it was going to be all worthwhile when we got to the Island and coming into the Cove and seeing the place and smelling the place and once the diesel engines were shut off hearing the creek: we knew we were home. So when we talk about river and food that's my first stop.

Tahi: So that river that Creek played a big part of you being on the island? Providing food, fresh water?

Rua: You know what it didn't really because the food sources were one that we never relied on the creek, the crayfish, we collected our rainwater from the roof, we would use the creek on dry season but never fully relied on it. For me the creek was just there, it was a part of the place, it had no real, I don't know, utility insofar as the practices we were engaged in, birding, apart from being. For us the birds were the primary focus when we're all on the Island, the prime reason for being there. The creek itself was just part of the natural environment, just there. And we were aware of it, but had little interaction with it. Our primary interaction was with the birds via the landscape.

Tahi: You're just making this more complicated! The story of your river is actually the story of the birds.

Rua: *laugh* Yeah, I always end up telling stories about the birds *laugh*. But you know what, it is the same story! Whether it's about the birds or the creek or the trees it's been a story of interaction with a place and with the resources of the place that is the key to this really eh? And you know that's an interesting story because both the people and the birds come to the island stay for a while do whatever it is we do and then leave. The water the river stays there and just "is" if that makes any sense. When we were growing up, of course we knew the birds went away and we would go not long after, but we were never sure exactly where it was they went, until the more recent research studies that show where the banded birds migrated to. We talked about Siberia, without really knowing where that was. And without really caring either to be honest, because we knew they would return. So when the birds left the island, we would leave the island and returned to the mainland or New Zealand as we called it. We did, and still do largely think about the island as a different place not associated with New Zealand. In the same way we would think about the birds, when they left and when they would return not so much as where they would go. When we would see them again, it would be on that island and therefore we link to that place, that land. And I suppose in a way when we thought about, you know, for us the island being home, we considered the same for the birds, they nested there they fledged there, and it was their home. But in reality, they stayed for a while and then left, like us they left.



I had the opportunity to reflect on this a couple of times in the last few years. Myself and Simon through the Kaihaukai art project put an application in to attend a symposium around water based in Rarotonga. When we were considering the brief we thought what can the Kaihaukai project bring to this event. And we thought about our food: for me Tītī, for Simon, Tuna. We are trying desperately to make a connection to the kaupapa of the symposium, a trip to Rarotonga sounded pretty bloody sweet to be honest! Then it came to us: the tuna has a migration pattern that sees him swim up to the Tongan basin. So where Irakehu interact with them in Wairewa, is just part of where they live, a very important part but just part of the larger story. Just like the Tītī. They used the water as a migration pathway, under, on or above. They don't live either here or there, wherever there is, they live in the world, regardless of people. This gave rise to question then of place and activity. We harvest both of these resources and in our relationship with them create and identity for ourselves around kai practice, place etc. and in doing so, saying this is who we are. We define ourselves. But we wondered for those species and their interaction with us and with practice and place, is it so definitive? We didn't get to go to Rarotonga so we didn't really get to follow up on that question *laugh*



The second story that relates to this conversation around food and place and I suppose occupancy, was once again with the Kaihaukai project when we were in New Mexico. We were there as a part of an Electronic Arts Symposium, and our project was around connecting people and food via electronic media. Anyway to cut a long story short (which isn't my usual modus operandi), we were lucky enough to meet some First Nations peoples from all over the continent including Inuit people from Alaska. We shared kai, from us Tītī and Tuna, and from them air dried seal meat and Muktuk, which is whale blubber. These being two of their iconic foods. During conversations, our friend Abra was skyping with Mike and Emma, you know Awarua, were talking about food. Mike was talking about the migratory path of the Tītī, and how they went up into the waters off Alaska. Abra, her food is the Bowhead Whale, said that they had seen great black flocks of birds in the water with the Whale, and wondered who he was. It was of course the Tītī. It was an amazing moment because we realised that our food and her food were sharing food together, and had been doing for many, many generations.



Tahi: So initially I asked you to talk about your river, and you talk about one river or a creek and a food around that then you talked about other food from another river; the Tuna, then you talked about another body of water going up through the Pacific and then another body of water going up near the Arctic Circle and another food source, and their food source. Now, when you're talking I'm trying to draw this picture but it keeps changing and moving and evolving.

Rua: *laugh* Yeah I know. As a boy growing up and even as a man that Island: sight, smell, sound, that was and is the centre of the universe, even if I can't make it there, and when I can't I get shitty as eh! *laugh*. Down there we think about the special relationship with the birds and a from a completely selfish perspective, we don't really, we don't consider the birds having another relationship, if that makes any sense. But of course they do. The Island and us play a part in their lives but their reality is much bigger. They migrate, and when they come to the Island they stay temporarily, And the Tuna, he migrates and he comes to the river and he stays temporarily, and the Bowhead Whale he migrates, and he stays temporarily.

