

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand. Episode 76: Ball and Water Sports. This podcast is supported by our amazing Patrons. If you want to support HANZ go to [patreon.com/historyaotearoa](https://patreon.com/historyaotearoa). Last time, we began looking at taonga tākaro, Māori games, at this stage games that involved some physical activity. Today we will be talking about some more ngā mahi tinana, physical games that involved running around, jumping, throwing, catching and other sweat inducing activities. In particular we will be taking a look at kī-o-rahi, a Māori ball game that bears some slight similarity to rugby.

Before we get there though, we have some other games to talk about that we couldn't fit in last episode. Lets start with games involving pīrori. These were basically hula hoops made of vines, such as supplejack, and were around 60cm in diameter though some could be rather large, up to 3m. Pīrori were used in many different types of games, a fairly straight forward one was to throw you pīrori as high as you could into the air and catch it as it came back down. The person who threw it the highest and caught it successfully, wins. This is kinda similar to games we saw last time whereby a poi was thrown up and some sort of song or verse was recited. In those games the aim wasn't explicitly to throw the poi as high as you could, the goal was to recite as much of the verse as fast as possible or in as little throws as possible, which was of course made easier by throwing the poi higher. So for these games the reciting acted as the measurement of success, replacing the need to assess how high the poi was before the invention of standardised rulers. A pretty clever workaround! For whatever reason, though, this format wasn't followed for games involving pīrori, Māori wanted to explicitly know who had thrown their hoop the highest. To this end, these throwing games would be played next to a tree, with the trunk, branches and other defining features acting as visual markers to determine how high a pīrori was thrown and thus who had thrown it the highest, making them the winner. A slightly more complicated game had multiple pīrori on the ground with sticks in between them. The idea was to hop over the hoops, pick up the stick with your feet and then throw it into the other hoops, though I'm unsure how the game was won or if there was any scoring system. Another game involved players standing in two lines and throwing hoops back and forth to each other, again not how this was scored but presumably it was whichever pair managed to throw and catch the pīrori the furthest. There was also a game called pai peke which had the player spin the hoop around their legs, hips or even neck while other players tried to time themselves well enough to jump through the pīrori without getting caught in it. The higher up the player the hoop was, the more difficult the game became so sometimes less skilled players would make it a bit easier by jumping off a wall or tree branch if needed. Wī was a team game where each team would be standing in a circle holding hands with the pīrori sitting on their arms. The goal was to move, step through and otherwise get the hoop around everyone in the team without breaking the circle by letting go of anyone's hands. Of course, the added excitement was that you had to do this before the other team did. Some pīrori games also involved using them as targets by just trying to throw something into it as it lay on the ground, often with some sort of rhthymical or musical element to it.

As there were all sorts of different games on land, there were a variety of pasttimes in the water too. Like a lot of places in the world, swimming was popular in areas on the coast or where there was a decently sized river, such as the Waikato River. Swimming competitions were fairly standard in that it was mostly about being the fastest getting from one place to another. What is quite interesting is that pre-European Māori swimmers would have likely looked very similar when racing to the finish line as our modern Olympic swimmers. Obviously they didn't have the cap, goggles and speedos but Māori had four different styles of stroke, three of which corresponded roughly today's breaststroke, back stroke and freestyle. They also apparently had what Best calls a side stroke but in typical Elsdon Best fashion, he doesn't elaborate on what this was or what it looked like. The only

thing he really says further is that it was favoured for longer distances and was the most popular stroke. Something else that is quite similar to today is that a popular activity was to jump into the water from a high place, whether that be a tree, a cliff or a rope swing, which of course is still enjoyed by modern kids in Aotearoa. Large sticks could also be used as diving boards when put over the edge of a bank, though they weren't very springy. Diving like this was called ruku in Te Reo and Best found it rather unusual cause Māori would jump in feet first, whereas Europeans would dive in head first. Again, Best doesn't really expand on this observation other than he observed it so I'm a little unsure why we thought it important enough to write down as I find it unlikely that kids in Europe were doing proper diving technique everytime they ran down to the river to have some fun. The reason Māori probably went feet first though is that there was some recorded instances of deaths from when someone had jumped into the water head first and hit a rock or similiar.

To get to the point of being able to unleash your kids upon the water, they of course had to be taught how to not immediately drown. Swimming was taught from a very young age with dried gourds sometimes being put in nets and tied to the child to act as a flotation device to help them as they learned. The gourd could also just be held close to the chest with one hand as the other hand did the swimming, but this wasn't very common. No doubt cause it was awkward and impractical, kinda like how you would try to push down a inflated football in the water and it would just quickly pop back up again.

The rope swings I mentioned a minute ago were called moari and aren't exactly like the rope swings we would think of today, though the concept was pretty similar. They would be made of the trunk of the kahikatea tree with cords hanging off the top that were what was used to swing around on. As you might expect, these were usually erected near a river or lake so that the swinger (ha) could swing over the body of water, let go and make a big splash fairly safely. That wasn't always the case though, moari were sometimes set up in areas that were open and without any water in sight. In general, these rope swings would have a dozen or so ropes attached to them at the top with the trunk set to a slight lean to stop the cords from wrapping around the trunk and getting tangled. The way they were attached at the top was by a little ring, which was made of harakeke or similar fibre. This ring would act as a swivel and helped the ropes go around the trunk more easily, though it wasn't always used. So between the ring and the trunk set to a bit of a lean, there were two systems to allow the ropes to move around freely and not get caught up, which Best found rather unusual. He acknowledges that if the ring was used then he isn't sure why the trunk was on a lean, since they both served the same purpose. Though personally I suspect that problems had been encountered in the past which had resulted in the final design, which is often why products end up the way they do. Injuries were fairly common, as you might have guess, with one account saying "I once saw a Māori sent spinning through the air from a sixty feat moari and disappear through the tops of some puriri trees. He was not killed, but he could not bear us to touch him, as many of his bones were broken." Interestingly, some moari were erected as a form of mourning for dead loved ones.

Although it was more popular in the warmer regions of the Pacific, there was a bit of surfing going on in Aotearoa, either with or without a board or sometimes with a small waka. As far as I can tell, it seems to be pretty similar to modern surfing, you swim out to a spot on a wooden board, which was just under a metre in length, wait for a wave to come and then ride it back to shore. The boards were called kopapa, which is also the term for a small waka. These waka would sometimes have two or three people in them and were used in much the same way as the wooden boards were, they would paddle out, wait for a wave and then ride it back in. The main difference being the person at the bow would use their paddle to steer the vessel somewhat and stop them from being parallel to the wave, which would no doubt cause them all to capsize. If they didn't have a paddle, or they lost

it in the wave, they would jump into the water and grab the stern, with the ensuing drag causing the waka to face the direction they wanted to go, though I doubt it was a very pleasant experience! Funnily enough, surfing was very popular on the east coast of the North Island, where I believe surfing is still quite popular to this day.

A more recent development in Māori sea sports is waka ama, which came about in the 1980s. There is evidence to suggest that Māori did have some form of waka racing prior to European arrival but the sport in its modern form came about much more recently. Part of its appeal is that is very similar to other boating sports that most of the world would be familiar with but with a Māori and wider Polynesian twist as all vessels use a single hulled waka with an outrigger, just like has been used in the Pacific for thousands of years. From what I can gather, the sport was mostly pioneered by two guys, Kris Kjeldsen and Bo Herbert, who had a company in Northland building Chinese dragonboats for racing, which was gaining popularity in the 80s. Dragonboats, like Polynesian waka, have a long history and in fact are paddled in much the same way, so a lot of the boat building skills Kjeldsen and Herbert had were likely transferable to building outrigger canoes. What they wanted to do then was to encourage the creation of more boating clubs, specifically for vessels with outriggers, which would in turn increase demand for their skills and services. To this in, they applied to the International Polynesian Canoe Federation in 1988 to host the next World Outrigger Canoe Championships here in New Zealand. The Federation gave them the nod but the problem then became that they couldn't keep up with demand. They were the only outrigger manufacturer in the entire country and they were basically based out of a shed. To try alleviate this, they went to the government for some aid, which resulted in them getting some subsidised labour. They also did some clever marketing by calling the sport waka ama, which tied it to the Māori sports of old, which appealed to both sports agencies and iwi alike, who also provided support and funding. From there, the company grew to become one of the leading manufacturers of outrigger waka in Aotearoa. Now, most of this info was taken from a particular source and I should stress that the origins of the company differ on their website. Looking at the website of Moana Nui, the name of the company, it says that they were founded in 1987 so that the pair could build the fleet of waka for the world champs. This seems to imply that they weren't founded to make dragonboats and weren't as much of the driving force behind the World Champs being brought here. Additionally the official Waka Ama NZ website makes no mention of Moana Nui or anything from the story above. Whatever the case, the commodification of the sport has been and still is debated but some do consider that since the sport has been backed by various iwi and people with a lot of mana, all of whom have given the sport karakia, various traditions and such that it is as Māori as anything else. Many view invention, innovation and change, whilst still holding true to Māori values and customs, as the way forward for Māori in general and that this is one aspect of that. Even if it isn't totally based on something that was being done by their tūpuna, that doesn't make it any less legitimately Māori. This is just one view though, there are also those that feel that Māori culture, language etc. should push against change as this is what was essentially forced on them through colonisation. This is a very large generalisation though and not something that is my place to comment on.

All this practice being in and around the water ended up being rather useful upon the arrival of Europeans. Māori, and in fact many indigenous peoples in the Pacific, were so confident in their swimming that after being captured, put on a ship and out of sight of land, they would sneak off at night, jump into the sea and swim back home!

Alright then, let's talk about probably one of the most popular and well known Māori games, kī-o-rahi! As I mentioned at the start, kī-o-rahi is a ball game that has some similar concepts in it as rugby, such as running with the ball in the arm and tackling to stop the opposing team scoring. The

game has been revived and become very popular in recent years and is played in tournaments all across the country and in schools. We do know that the modern version of the game was condensed from a few similar games, Best recorded a number of ball games just from Tūhoe, so it is possible that some of the game has been changed to fit an audience that is familiar with rugby to make it a bit easier to get into. In fact, the term kī-o-rahi itself is a modern term and likely wasn't used by Māori who played their version hundreds of years ago, the name surfaced around 1940 and is often used in reference to any Māori game that is played on a circular field. Yeah, it's played on a circular field! The field has a pillar in the middle, called a pou tupu, or just tupu, otherwise there could be a pou tangata, a person in the middle acting in place of the tupu. There are also seven other pou around the field but we will get into how the field is set up and how the game is played in a minute. Being a ball game, ki-o-rahi obviously has a ball as a central component, called a kī. Historically this would be any sort of roundish object, such as a poi, some poi being made especially for the game. Sometimes a pumice stone or a ball made of wood could be used as well. Nowadays a soccer ball is the kī of choice, rather than a rugby ball as that is oval and the game needs to be played with a round ball.

Upon the arrival of Europeans, missionaries weren't too keen on the game as they associated it with paganism and specifically phallic worship due to the pou tupu at the centre of the field, which is a key component of the game. This is of course absolutely not the case, as far as we know, there was no element of phallic worship being an even minor part of the game, with Best saying "It is difficult to see where any proof lies". For a bunch of fellas that were often about abstinence, they sound pretty obsessed with other people's genitals. On a more serious note, this meant that missionaries, who were going about converting the Māori population to Christianity, were discouraging these games to be played and as such a lot of knowledge around them was lost as they were played less and less.

So let's get into how the game is actually played. As mentioned before, kī-o-rahi involves tackling other players so it is a full contact game, though there are touch versions or rippa rugby tags can be used instead if you aren't into being slammed into the ground. The field is circular and is about 45m in diameter and split into different zones. Today these are marked out quite visibly with lines or with each zone being a different colour if it's an artificial turf. Pre-European Māori didn't have the option of changing the ground to look fancy colours though so instead they would mark the field out by digging the lines into the ground, or sand if it was being played on a beach. Otherwise they would just go the lines entirely and the zones would be just be agreed upon by all players. So let's go through each of the zones, how big they are and kinda what they are for. After that we will go through the rules and how the game is played. This can be kinda confusing if you don't have a visual aid to help you so I'll put a picture up in the shownotes of an example of the field so you can get an idea of where everything is and the different areas I am talking about.

At the centre of the field was the tupu, as we mentioned before. This is a central part of the game and is one of the ways points are scored. Usually it was a large log or rock but it could also be a carved pou as well, often named after a tīpuna. The area that the tupu is situated is the wairua, the same word that means soul or spirit. The wairua is pretty small and is only immediately around the the tupu. Around the wairua is the pāwero and when the tupu, wairua and pāwero are combined they make up the motu, island. This area is about 9-10m in diameter and is linked to the story of Rahitūtakahina, a demi god that became trapped on a motu and escaped. The pāwero/motu is the circle in the centre of the field and is surrounded by another zone in a ring, called Te Roto, the lake. This area is about 6m wide except for a 2m wide gap on one side. This gap is Te Ara and connects the motu to the outer most area of the field. Te Ara, meaning the path, represents the path that Rahitūtakahina took to escape the island and is related to the movement of players in the motu out

into Te Ao. Te Ao, the world, is the outer most area and could be the largest area of play depending on how the field is set up, being about 10m wide. Within it are seven other pou set at regular intervals, in the old days these would sometimes be small logs that were occasionally carved or if that wasn't available, they could just be sticks put into the ground or large, flat rocks or even just a mound of dirt. Today, modern sports equipment is used for safety. The final area is Te Marama, the moon, and is a small circle of space on the edge of the field, on the same side as Te Ara, the path to escape the motu. This area is mostly only used to begin play, either at the start of a quarter or after a tupu manawa, a try, is scored. To begin, a player will throw the ball from Te Marama into the motu, if they don't do this, possession of the ball is handed over to the opposing team.

So that's how the field was arranged and set up but now we need some rules to actually play it. These rules do change slightly depending on where you are and who you are playing with but this will give you a pretty good idea of how the game is played. Each game has quarters, which can last 5-15mins, again depending who is playing. Before kickoff, players are split up into two teams, the kīoma, or ball carrier team and taniwha, or creatures of the lake team, with each team placing themselves around the field. Each team plays half the game as kīoma and the other half as taniwha switching sides either every quarter or at half time, so both teams get to have a go at both modes of play. Depending on what team they are on, the areas they are allowed to put themselves is restricted. To me, this is one of the most interesting aspects of kī-o-rahi, because unlike games like rugby, football, basketball or most other sports, each team isn't trying to achieve the same goal and in fact they don't score points in the same way either.

Each team has eight or so players, for the kīoma team, they can split their players into two areas. Up to three players in the motu with the other five in Te Ao, except when play starts, there is one person in Te Marama to begin the game who then joins the players in Te Ao. The players in the motu are called the kaitiaki, guardians, and as you might suspect from their name their job is to stop the ball from touching the tupu, which is how the taniwha team scores. The catch is that the kīoma team are only allowed three players in the motu at any one time and they are not allowed to step over the boundary into Te Roto. As such the only way out of the motu is via Te Ara, the path through Te Roto, which is how players enter and exit the motu if they want increase or decrease the amount of players guarding the the tupu. They also aren't allowed to interfere with the game as they are running through Te Ara. Players in Te Ao on the other hand, their goal is to touch the ball to the seven pou around Te Ao, for every pou they touch they bank one point. Those banked points aren't counted in the score though they are able to make a try. This is done by entering Te Roto, which they can only do with the ball, and must get the ball on the ground in the motu. If they manage to do this, any banked points they have are added to their score. Of course, this is easier said than done as while the kīoma team is trying to do all of this, the taniwha team is trying to tackle you and if they are successful, possession of the ball changes.

The taniwha team are allowed to place their players anywhere in Te Ao and Te Roto and are able to move through those areas whenever they want. The only place they aren't allowed to go is into the motu. This can vary slightly with some rules saying their allowed a max of five players in Te Roto trying to score and three players in Te Ao defending the pou, though all their players can be in Te Ao when kīoma have possession and are trying to score. The way the taniwha team score is the kī touching the tupu. This can be either by throwing or kicking it from Te Roto or jumping from there into the motu and throwing, provided the ball is released before they touch the ground or even if the kīoma team accidentally make the ball touch the tupu. However the kī touches it, when does hit the tupu, taniwha score a point. If the kī lands in the motu, it is handed back to the taniwha team but if it lands outside the motu, play continues with no stopping. The taniwha players are only given

about five seconds to make a shot once they are in Te Roto with the ball, with the timer resetting every time a shot is made so play is encouraged to be fast and shots at the tupu frequent.

There are also rules around penalties and the like but that is most of how to play kī-o-rahi, which is played all across the country at various marae and inter iwi tournaments.

Next time, we will continue discussing physical games that use a variety of fun objects, from balls to stilts. We will also expand on the old Matariki episode to talk about some interesting uses for kites.

If you want to send me feedback, ask a question, suggest a topic or just have a chinwag you can find my email and social media on [historyaotearoa.com](http://historyaotearoa.com). You can also find helpful resources there like transcripts, sources and translations for some of the Te Reo Māori we have used. You can help support HANZ through Patreon, buying merch or giving us a review, it means a lot and helps spread the story of Aotearoa New Zealand. As always, haere tū atu, hoki tū mai. See you next time!

Are you a current or former student of the University of Otago in Dunedin? Did you have a great story to tell about your time there? Then I want to hear from you! I am making an episode about Otago student and flatting culture and I thought it might be a bit fun to have some stories to tell in the episode! The stories can be funny, silly, gross, dramatic or whatever you want, as long as the story is good! I'd prefer if it was true but I won't know if you embellish a few details. They can also be from any decade, so whether you were at Otago a few years ago or in the 80s, I'd still love to hear from you! I'll choose the best ones to read out in the episode and you are more than welcome to remain anonymous if you so choose, I understand that you may not want the story coming back to bite you on the ass, so you can share them with me with confidence! If you have a story you want to be told, you can DM me on Twitter [@historyaotearoa](https://twitter.com/historyaotearoa), or Instagram or Facebook, History of Aotearoa New Zealand Podcast or via email [historyaotearoa@gmail.com](mailto:historyaotearoa@gmail.com). Hoping to hear some great stories!