



The sands of hope

By Bill Pugh

At Half Moon Bay at Black Rock, cliffs surrounding sand make an amphitheatre. It's a family place for summer days. Families spend a day there, mum providing lunch, cool drinks and a thermos of tea for the grandparents. And, of course, there is a small kiosk, which sells fish and chips, ice cream and col-oured drinks. The seagulls wait, ready to dive on a chip which is tossed out by a child.

The beach is not the only scene of activity and pleasure. It is a place to launch boats. And down the steep driveway to the sea come boats to be launched from a ramp into the water. Serious fisher folk are in the line ready to stay out all night to get a good catch. A small jetty reaches out into the water, a place for a stroll and to look for fish swimming below.

A special time to be there is at the setting of the sun. A ball of changing colour spreading rays of light skywards as it sinks behind the horizon, leaving rays of pink, fading, till the stars appear.

Dotted on the still sea are the fishing boats, twinkling lights indicating their spot, waiting for a catch and a morning return to shore, hopefully with a good result. Lights point to moored container ships on the horizon, waiting to be

loaded. Whatever the time of the year there is always a reason to be at Half Moon Bay.

In winter you can sit in the car and watch the waves crashing against the breakwater, and the spray reaching where diners sit to eat their fish and chips in summer.

For recreation and enlightenment, there are walks on the path by the sea, a climb to the winding trail above.

In a quite special way the changing scenes at Half Moon Bay encapsulate the experience of human life. Summer and winter. Family, picnics, sun and sand and sea, the provision of the sea. Holidays, recreation and the need to care for our environmental inheritance. Grey times, sad times, many good times, and new born life ... the need to count our blessings and value our days.

And this perhaps hints at our need for a word of hope. Sometimes in the morning there is a mist over the sea at Half Moon Bay. From the shore you are not able to see the fishing boats which have been there throughout the night and, on the horizon, the container ships waiting to be loaded. Then the morning sun causes the mist to rise and all is well on the sea.

Reflection:

*A Jewish meditation puts it thus: "As the moon sinks on the mountain-edge
The fisherman's lights flicker far out on the dark wide sea
When we think that we alone are steering our ships at midnight,
We hear the splash of oars far beyond us."*