Phil on Mt Blanc du Tacul in 2006

Hard though it is, I want to say a public 'goodbye' and thankyou to Alpinism and Ski.

Not to Gary and Iris, who have become and will remain my very good friends.

But to New Zealand's best boutique guiding company which has so extended my horizons and taken me places, physically and mentally, I had no idea I could go.

I don't want to say goodbye. I don't want my mountaineering career to be over.

But our most recent expedition, in Switzerland in July, made it clear to both Gary and I that I had physical issues which couldn't be explained away by old age. And those became diagnosed as a very rare condition which affects both my heart and my bone marrow.

So reality being what it is, there will be no more mountaineering, no more ski-touring, and probably no more wonderful trekking.

And so, after 16 trips, it's time to say thanks. There have been many great experiences. The Weissmies/Lagginhorn/Allalinhorn week was tough but special with three back-to-back 4000m peaks. The Copeland Pass was a wonderful trip. And we've had some great ski-touring weeks – none better than the traverse from Centennial Hut above the Franz over on the Fox Glacier and down all the way to the door of the Chancellor Hut.

And Aoraki/Mt Cook. That was *the* crowning achievement.

Thanks for pushing me to achieve. Thanks for keeping me safe. Thanks for making me aware that most of our limitations are those we put there ourselves.

Thanks for taking me into the mountains in New Zealand and Europe. Thanks for allowing me to experience those spiritual moments that come with being high above the world, tiny and insignificant in the silent, empty vastness of the Southern Alps

I had no real intention of becoming a mountaineer – guided or otherwise. It was only after I realised what a buzz I got from being up in the high Alps that I got the "bug" – a pretty ridiculous thing to start in your mid-fifties!

And it's hard work. I've spent months on diets, going without wine, flogging myself at the gym, hauling the aging body up hills in a bid to get the requisite number of "vertical metres" under my belt in time for the year's climbing week or ski-touring trip.

There have been many, many times when I've dragged one foot in front of another, thinking to myself.."this is all too hard, why am I doing it".

But for all the pain and suffering, I love my mountain adventures.

I love the environment, I love the sense of being on top of the world, I love the intensity of the effort and the focus on making sure hands and feet are where they should be and what you're hanging on to is not going to give way. And I love the feeling of accomplishment and

the hot shower that washes the salt off your skin after several days of sweating into the same clothes.

I'm really sad to have to give it up. But I'm not half as sad, as I am glad to have had those great years.

Climbing:

- Lendenfeldt , Southern Alps, NZ
- Mt Blanc de Chailon, Pigne d'Arolla, Mt Blanc du Tacul – Switzerland/France
- Weissmies, Trient Plateau, Aiguille du Tour, Tete Blanche, Petite Fourche – Switzerland
- Les Diablerets, Weissmies traverse, Allalinhorn, Lagginhorn, Jägihorn – Switzerland
- Tete Blanche (north face), Grand Louis (north face), Jungfrau, Mönch – Switzerland
- Aoraki/Mt Cook, Southern Alps, NZ
- Pigne de la Lé, Point de Moiry, Tritthorn – Switzerland
- Dossen – Switzerland

Ski Touring: (all Southern Alps, NZ)

- Tasman Glacier
- Fox Glacier/Franz Josef Glacier neve
- Tasman Glacier
- Murchison Glacier
- Fox/Franz Josef neve
- Tasman Saddle

Trekking:

- Copland Pass, Southern Alps
- Rabbit Pass, Mt Aspiring National Park

Phil Melchior