



Passage du Grand S^t Bernard par l'Arrière-Frontière de l'Autriche recommandé par le G^{ral} Inf. M^r Berthier, sous le commandement de Beniguet, Paroisse Consul.
 Le 25 Mars 1815. On a vu passer par le S^t Bernard, deux hommes et un chien, dit-on, pour le traverser les Alpes.
 Par l'Arrière-Frontière de l'Autriche, sous le commandement de Beniguet, Paroisse Consul.

Reproduction of an old print from the collection of R. W. Lloyd.

THE ALPINE JOURNAL.

MAY 1935.

(No. 250.)

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS.

By JOHN J. WITHERS, PRESIDENT OF THE ALPINE CLUB.

(Read before the Alpine Club, December 10, 1934.)

IT is the custom of the retiring President to address the Club, giving a short survey of the various important matters which have occurred during his Presidency. I, of course, have great pleasure in adhering to the tradition, and will do my best to put before the Club the principal matters which have happened in the Mountaineering world during my Presidency.

I should like to divide the matter of my address into five heads :

- (i) Mountaineering feats.
- (ii) Accidents.
- (iii) Literature.
- (iv) Losses to the Club.
- (v) Some general remarks on the present position and the future prospects of mountaineering.

(i) *Mountaineering Feats.*

These naturally fall under two heads :

- (A) Work done in the Alps, and
- (B) Work accomplished in other mountaineering districts.

I will first deal with the work in the Alps. Foremost, of course, stand the extremely fine performances of Professor

Graham Brown, of which I should like to mention specially the following four expeditions :

- (1) First crossing of Col Maudit, 1932.
- (2) New route up S. face of Mont Blanc, 1933—the *Via della Pera*.
- (3) First crossing of 'Col Major' between Mont Blanc and Mont Blanc de Courmayeur, 1933.
- (4) First traverse of all the peaks of L'Ailefroide and a new direct route on Les Bans from the Glacier de la Pilatte, 1933, made in company with Mr. Basil Goodfellow.

Beyond these and during the past three years, the N. faces of certain Oberland mountains have been successfully climbed, but in some cases these successes are more in the nature of variations on former and more justifiable routes: Lauterbrunnen-Breithorn, Grosshorn and Gletscherhorn by the late Dr. Welzenbach's party in 1932 are cases in point; so is the 1934 route by a British lady, with Adolf Rubi, on the N. face of the Mönch. But Lauper's and Zürcher's ascent of the N. face of the Eiger in 1932, Welzenbach's dangerous route on the N.E. slope of Gspaltenhorn, and Stösser's forcing of the S.E. arête of Bietschhorn in 1932 are genuine examples of the newest developments of Alpine technique.

Also, I must mention the first ascent of the N.W. (Valjouffrey) face of Pic d'Olan by Gervasutti and Devies, the greatest new expedition of 1934. I should also chronicle the very dangerous ascent by Karl Schneider and his companion of the Dent Blanche by the W. (Ferpècle) arête, attained from the N.W.

La Meije, Grand Pic, was climbed direct from the S. without touching either the Glacier Carré or the *Cheval rouge*. The route taken approximates with that of the Mayer-Dibona party towards the 'arêtes' (attempted with fatal results by Emil Zsigmondy), and then bears to the W. and N. The climb was unfortunately spoilt by the copious use of pitons and swivels and cannot therefore rank as a true first ascent. The party was led by the well-known French amateur, J. Vernet.

With regard to mechanized methods as practised in recent times by some Continental climbers, I would suggest that ascents made entirely by pitons and swivels—the N. face of the Grosse Zinne being a grotesque example—should not be recognized in the responsible Alpine periodicals of any country as being 'First Ascents.' The ALPINE JOURNAL does *not* recognize the nailing of the said N. face of the Grosse Zinne as a genuine ascent.

Finally, I must record, as accomplished in 1934, the traverse of Mont Noir de Péteret—Aiguille Noire de Péteret (Dames Anglaises turned)—Aiguille Blanche de Péteret—Col de Péteret—Mont Blanc, in four days by a combined Austro-German party. This is one of the greatest expeditions in the Alps and was first conceived jointly by Messrs. Geoffrey Young and H. O. Jones in 1912 and subsequently by the late Paul Preuss.

With regard to expeditions outside the Alps, of course the most interesting to us, and probably the most important of all, was the attempt on Everest in 1933 under the leadership of Mr. Hugh Ruttledge. It was, unfortunately, unsuccessful in attaining the actual summit, but I will not deal with the details, because they are described so admirably in the book *Everest*, 1933, written by Mr. Ruttledge, which I think is one of the most entrancing works on mountain travel I have ever read. It is very well narrated, beautifully printed with excellent maps and illustrations, and is worthy of the great adventure. Apart from the general information available in the book, I should like to draw attention to one or two points which I think are particularly interesting :

(a) As I mentioned last year, the finding of the axe of Irvine or Mallory above the highest camp. The circumstances are discussed in detail in the book, but I cannot quite follow what decision has been deduced from the circumstances. I rather gather, however, that the idea is that Irvine and Mallory had a fatal accident somewhere about the spot where the axe was found, and probably that this occurred during the ascent. If such is the case, Mr. Odell's idea that he saw them on the second step of the mountain, near the summit, cannot be right. Mr. Odell's letter in the last number of the *JOURNAL* is most interesting. It may be a long time before we know the facts, but I sincerely hope that when we ultimately get leave to make another attempt on the mountain, and an expedition gets to the top, they will find that Mr. Odell's surmise is correct, and that a record will be found on the summit of Irvine and Mallory's ascent.

(b) Another very interesting matter is spoken of by Mr. Smythe, and that is the psychological effect of walking alone in high mountain places. The idea it engenders is that somebody is with you the whole time, although you cannot see him. It is very odd, but I personally have had this feeling, and I have felt it so strongly that on occasions I have hidden behind a rock to see whether my companion would not pass me and come out into the open, subsequently satisfying myself that it was

merely a psychological experience. It is curious to see that it is recorded and to hear that Mr. Smythe has had similar experiences.

I think Mr. Smythe's feat of going by himself to the highest point attained on the mountain, and subsequently remaining alone in the highest camp, is an astonishing climbing record and bears great testimony to his nerve and mountaineering skill.

Next I should like to mention the Dyhrenfurth expedition to the Karakoram Himalaya, 1934, in which the four peaks of 'Queen Mary' were conquered. Mme. Dyhrenfurth reached the summit of the western peak, and it appears certain that she has set up a new record for women, beating that made twenty years ago by Mrs. Bullock Workman by a considerable height. The further claim as to the altitude of the highest peak of the mountain cannot be accepted.

Some very important work in the Nanda Devi region of the Garhwal-Kumaon Himalaya has been performed by Messrs. Shipton and Tilman, but at the time of writing this address all that I am able to obtain is a bare outline of what appears to have been a most remarkable work of exploration lasting some five months. Leaving Ranikhet early in May with three 'Everest' Sherpa porters, they managed to force their way up the tremendous Rishi Ganga gorge and explored the northern glacier basin of Nanda Devi, climbing a 21,000-ft. peak and being twice defeated by another of 23,000 ft. Fearing the monsoon would break too early—as it subsequently did—and flood the gorge behind them, they retreated. The party then explored the Arwa and other glaciers, and under great difficulties mounted the Satopanth Glacier and crossed the Badrinath-Kedarnath watershed. Weather was so bad at times that, in jungle, they once spent eight days in progressing eight miles! As the monsoon lost violence they returned up the Rishi Ganga, mapped the southern basin of Nanda Devi, and actually climbed to 21,000 ft. on a southern ridge of that formidable peak, the foot of which no party has hitherto succeeded in reaching. A possible route—granted good conditions—has thus been discovered. The party returned over the very difficult Sunderdhunga Pass, 19,000 ft., to Ranikhet—the pass which had defeated Mr. Rutledge in his attempt to reach the great basin by its southern wall in 1932.

The expedition appears to have been a model of what a small party, travelling exceedingly light, is able to accomplish. The three Sherpa porters more than lived up to their Everest

reputations, and the few auxiliary, local Bhutias employed rendered brilliant services.

The following should also be recorded :

The highly successful 1932 expedition of the D. u. Œ. A.-V. to the Cordillera Blanca, led by our member Philip Borchers.

The 1932 Belgian expedition to Ruwenzori, led by our member Xavier de Grunne.

Marco Pallis's expedition to the Gangotri in 1933, which included our member Dr. Warren.

Reginald Schomberg's several expeditions in Central Asia, on which he is still engaged.

The second ascent of Trisul by P. R. Oliver in 1933, a fine performance for two young soldiers travelling with the absolute minimum of porters and comforts.

The German-American expedition to Nanga Parbat, 1932.

Terris Moore's ascent of Minya Konka, W. China, in 1932—certainly the most successful and well-managed expedition of my term of office.

Mount Foraker expedition, Alaska, 1934. Professor Graham Brown was a member of the party. Another example of an admirably conducted expedition in which the party did all its own carrying.

Nanga Parbat—German expedition, 1934.

Sir Norman Watson's expedition to the Coast Range of British Columbia, 1934.

Two Swiss expeditions and one French to the Caucasus in 1933 and 1934. The first ascent of the highest peak of Mishirgitau, 16,408 ft., was made by the Swiss in 1934.

Reference might be made to the Italian expedition to the Cordillera of this year, led by our member Count Bonacossa. They met with success, but two well-known mountaineers disappeared on Tronador through the sudden breaking of a terrific storm.

(ii) *Accidents.*

During my term of office, accidents have, unfortunately, been very numerous. The one that stands out above all others, so far as British mountaineers are concerned, is the loss of the four Eton Masters on Piz Roseg in 1933. This will be remembered by all members of the Club, and they will also have read in the JOURNAL that the Committee of the Alpine

Club thought it proper to address to the Committee of the Swiss Alpine Club a request that the said Committee should investigate the conduct of the parties who, having found traces of the accident, went subsequently to the top of the mountain, without returning either to try to reach the bodies or to give the alarm. The Committee of the Swiss Alpine Club reported that they considered the conduct of the parties was proper. Accordingly, the Committee of the Alpine Club, having deliberated on the matter, decided to write a letter to the Swiss Alpine Club stating that they could not agree with the S.A.C. Committee's conclusions, as they thought it was the *paramount* duty of a party in similar circumstances to reach the bodies if they could, and, if not, to return at once to the nearest inhabited place to give the alarm. The entire correspondence was printed in the *ALPINE JOURNAL* in order that all mountaineers might form their own conclusions. I am glad to say that the attitude of the Alpine Club seems to be accepted generally as the right one by most foreign mountaineers. I do not suggest for one moment that there was any sordid motive present in the mind of any member of the parties. This has been abundantly disproved. I think, however, that the members of the two parties lost their heads and did not realize the criticism which would be levelled against them. This was the impression which I myself got from speaking to one of the members, soon after the accident. There seems, however, to be a feeling in the Engadine that the Alpine Club Committee has gone too far. The local people draw a distinction in their minds between practical good sense and what may be called good taste. They state that the parties knew quite well that the victims must be lost, and therefore no good could be gained by going back, and they might as well continue their ascent ; on the other hand, imputations of bad taste ought not to come within the ambit of the inquiry. But, I may add, the memory of at least four accidents comes to my mind where survivors have been found and *rescued* even after a still more terrible fall than that of the Eton Masters. The splendid saving of Toni Schmid's companion in 1932¹ is a case in point and is in the recollection of all here present. I hope very much the incident may be considered closed, but I express my sincere thanks to the Swiss Alpine Club for their kindness in making the inquiry, and our knowledge that there was no imputation of sordid conduct in the matter. I would also state how appreciative the Club is of

¹ *A.J.* 44, 348-9.

the graceful gesture made by the *Union Internationale des Associations d'Alpinisme* (U.I.A.A.) when, at their meeting at Pontresina in September 1934, delegates showed their sympathy by placing wreaths on the graves in the cemetery of Santa Maria.

The other great mountaineering accident which has occurred recently is the disaster to the German expedition of 1934 on Nanga Parbat. At the time of writing this address I am unaware of the details, beyond knowing that ten persons were killed, amongst them our member Willy Merkl, the great German climber, whose loss we so greatly deplore. I thought it was only right, on hearing of the accident, to express to the German Ambassador our condolences, and the correspondence has been published in the JOURNAL.

It is difficult—perhaps presumptuous—to comment at the present moment on the causes of this, the greatest catastrophe that has so far occurred in the Himalaya—an accident surpassed in magnitude generally by but one, the loss of eleven lives in one day on Mont Blanc in 1870. But it will occur to all that the leader threw away the one great advantage conferred by having a large party at his disposal. The all-important lines of communication were neglected. No fewer than sixteen Europeans and porters were located at the highest camp, VIII, leaving the three standing camps immediately below *entirely empty*. When the great storm broke over the highest camp and retreat became inevitable, the great, unwieldy party, deteriorating rapidly, found all the camps above Camp IV swept away or submerged. Had these been occupied and held, if only for 24 hours, retreat without casualties should have been comparatively simple.

Paul Bauer on Kangchenjunga in 1929 retired successfully over far more difficult terrain and in weather at least as severe as that which proved fatal on Nanga Parbat. Bauer's masterly retreat is the classic example of 'support' tactics.

Willy Merkl, like Dr. Welzenbach, had survived with impunity many tempests and much exposure in the Alps. He and his brave companions forgot, I fear, the difference between an Alpine storm at ten or twelve thousand feet and a Himalayan blizzard at twenty-four thousand. In an assault on the greatest Himalayan summits not more than two members of a party can, or should be expected to, reach the top. It is a pleasure to be able to add that, according to information I have received from official and private sources, the treatment of the porters, both during and after the return of the expedition,

has given the greatest satisfaction to survivors and relatives alike. Admirable photographs of the N. face of Nanga Parbat and the position of the different camps appear in the S.A.C.'s *Die Alpen* and our JOURNAL.

One of the most fantastic accidents that took place is the following : Maurice Wilson, an aviator, who had never previously seen a mountain, smuggled himself into Tibet with three porters in the spring of 1934. With little or no food he left Camp III, East Rongbuk Glacier, proceeding towards the N. Col of Everest. He was never seen again. His porters waited three weeks, then, starving, returned to the Rongbuk Monastery and Sikkim. Similar accidents to solitary individuals with no mountaineering experience occurred to Farmer on Kangchenjunga in 1929 and to Marden towards Aconcagua in the winter of 1927. Such must be regarded as forms of suicide.

A very characteristic example of the present development of mountaineering was the loss of the two young British climbers on the S. side of Mont Blanc, namely, Messrs. J. D. Hoyland and P. Wand, aged 19 and 23. They, no doubt, were very good cragsmen, but they had no previous experience of the conditions on great mountains, nor indeed of the Alps at all, and their unfortunate deaths were not surprising. I will deal with an aspect of this matter later on in this address. Another lugubrious example of incompetence will be found in the double disaster to young Italian parties on the Matterhorn in August 1934. A still worse case of irresponsibility—not to say levity—was the accident to a British party on the Aiguille d'Argentière this same year. The deaths of three Swiss, caused by falling through the corniche of the Grosshorn, are rendered more gloomy by the presence of two local guides in the party. What an outcry would have been raised had this catastrophe occurred to a guideless party ! We have vivid recollections of Press comments on the fatality of Piz Roseg.

(iii) Literature.

The chief literary publications may be summarized as follows :

1932. Special books are the following :

1. *The Italian Expedition to the Himalaya, Karakoram, and Eastern Turkistan* : Filippo De Filippi.
2. *Climbers' Guide*—'Berninagruppe' : Marcel Kurz.
3. *Die Eroberung des Kaukasus* : Carl Egger.

And the others which I ought to mention are :

4. *Hors des Chemins battus* : E. R. Blanchet.
5. *Kamet Conquered* : F. S. Smythe.
6. *Episodes in a Varied Life* : Lord Conway of Allington.

1933. The special book is the following :

7. *Um den Kantsch* (Kangchenjunga, 1931) : Paul Bauer.

And the others I ought to mention are :

8. *An Epitome of Fifty Years' Climbing* : Claude Wilson.
9. *First over Everest* : Fellows and others.
10. *Letters and Diaries of A. F. R. Wollaston* : edited by his wife.
11. *The Naked Mountain* (Nanga Parbat) : Elizabeth Knowlton.

1934. The special books are the following :

12. *Alpine Pilgrimage* : Julius Kugy, translated by H. E. G. Tyndale. A very important work.
13. *Everest, 1933* : Hugh Ruttledge—of which I have spoken.
14. *Mountaineering* (Lonsdale series) : edited by Sydney Spencer. All the contributors are members of the Alpine Club and the publication is a most creditable and useful one.

And the others I ought to mention are :

15. *Manuel d'Alpinisme* : C. A. F.
16. *Mont Blanc Sideshow, Life and Times of Albert Smith* : J. Monroe Thorington.
17. *An Alpine Journey* : F. S. Smythe. A beautifully simple narrative taking one back to the time of the early Alpine explorers and books, such as Freshfield's *Italian Alps*.
18. *A Himalayan Wanderer* : General Bruce.
19. *Ces Monts affreux* : Charles Vallot and Mlle. C. E. Engel.
20. *Die Julischen Alpen im Bilde*, superlative illustrations : Julius Kugy.

All of these have been—or will be—reviewed in the JOURNAL.

(iv) *Losses to the Club.*

H.M. The King of the Belgians, a most skilful cragsman. Homage has been rendered in the ALPINE JOURNAL, and we are honoured greatly by the Queen's gift of his portrait in British

uniform. I should like to add that the Alpine Club, many of whose members served in Flanders, has subscribed towards the British Army Memorial to the memory of King Albert to be erected in Ypres Cathedral.

H.R.H. The Duke of the Abruzzi, a brilliant example of the mountain and Arctic explorer.

D. W. Freshfield, the 'doyen' of all mountaineers, master writer and geographer : a past President of the Club.

H. F. Montagnier, perhaps our greatest recent historian. Specialized in Alpine history prior to 1786.

Rev. A. V. Valentine-Richards, editor of 'Ball,' II, part i.

Sir George H. Makins, a great and much loved surgeon.

Sir H. Seymour King, a survivor of the early days of 'difficult' climbing.

Colin B. Philip, a great artist and water-colour painter. Specialized on Skye and rocks generally.

Rev. George Broke, editor of 'Ball,' II, part ii.

H. G. Watkins, as an Arctic explorer and leader was becoming a rival to the great Shackleton.

Dr. W. Inglis Clark, so well known to Scottish climbers.

Willy Merkl (already mentioned).

H. C. Baker and F. N. Ellis.

I must also record the deaths of Mrs. Aubrey Le Blond, the famous lady climber who lately passed away, and Franz Lochmatter, the distinguished guide who was killed in 1933 on the Weisshorn.

(v) *General.*

Having now dealt with the various details, I should like to make some general remarks as to the position of mountaineering in general.

The tendency which began to be apparent after the war has now developed, and it is abundantly clear that the whole conditions of mountaineering have practically changed. For some period before the war it was customary for young men who wished to climb to go to the Alps for, say, a month, with a couple of good guides, climb with them and learn the craft, after some years continuing to climb either with or without guides, as they thought best, but at any rate, in the latter case, with the knowledge they had obtained. Now that old fashion has gone out. As Dr. Wilson said in his speech three years ago, dealing with one aspect of the matter, namely, the very greatly increased death-roll : 'It has been due in the main to two causes ; the vast irruption of irresponsible people and

ignorant beginners venturing into areas of which they know nothing, and secondly the deliberate neglect by more experienced climbers of well-recognized rules of reasonable, safe climbing.'

Many of the present generation have never climbed with a guide. One of the best young 'moderns' did so on a particular occasion this year. He expressed much surprise at the guide's skill and frankly acknowledged that it far surpassed his own!

I have during the last few years visited some of the largest Alpine centres and it is extraordinary to see the changes which have taken place. There are some guideless parties; there are a few guided parties, but the guides have practically nothing to do. This, to a great extent, is due to the expense, for it is common knowledge that guides' tariffs have increased by nearly 50 per cent. since the war. Yet these latter, with the advent of Winter Sports, now enjoy a double season. It is also, I think, due to the feeling amongst the younger generation that the European mountains are overdone, finished, and that they can get better forms of adventure in distant fields, such as that outlined to us the other night so interestingly by Wing-Commander Beauman when dealing with the Mount Mystery Range in British Columbia. That is all to the good if the young adventurers have proper training before they go, and I hope very much to see a certain reaction which will compel the younger explorers to have, at any rate, one or two good seasons in the Alps, with first-rate guides, to teach them the fundamental technicalities. It is up to Switzerland and, in a lesser degree, to France and Italy to reduce all expenses as has been done so successfully in Austria.

As an indication of the recent trend of events it is interesting to see that in the last number of the JOURNAL there is only one paper on the *Alps* and that by a well-known lady climber. There is no paper by a member of the Alpine Club.

In order to stimulate interest in the old mountains, new experiments arise.

At the risk of entering into the zone of other countries' politics, it appears to be my duty to say a few words in strongest condemnation of a cloud that has long threatened and has now materialized as a practice in Alpine Societies—not to say the Governments—of at least one nation.

If rewards, *citations à l'ordre de la montagne*,² payments in kind are to be made—as unfortunately they are—for utterly

² Cf. *R.M.* liv, pp. 1-2.

reckless and completely useless variations on even the smallest pinnacle, accidents are certain to increase in yet greater numbers. It is well known that a large monetary reward has been promised to the first member of a certain country who may achieve the ascent of the northern face of the Grandes Jorasses. The medal for valour has actually been awarded to the conqueror of the Matterhorn's N. face. Young parties of cragsmen who have shown prowess on insignificant boulders are being subsidized to attempt similar feats in the greater Alps.

Such practices I must categorically condemn as nothing less than the most objectionable and fatal form of professionalism.

Referring to the Grandes Jorasses, no fewer than four parties found themselves together on the same day on the northern face last summer. One of these parties, composed of two distinguished, duly accredited and sane professionals—the only persons who *might* have made some progress—were the first to retire, although far ahead at the time. They were followed soon by two of the others. As to the fourth party, one member was killed and his companion rescued in the last stages of exhaustion—some days later.

At one time waiting at the foot of the Matterhorn, armed with every kind of 'Felsschlosserei,' were three parties about to attempt once more the northern face. I could cite numerous other examples, including one expedition which actually proved successful.

I know of a party, hindered by bad weather and, wonderful to relate, hesitating to start on a most dangerous route, of which one member declared that 'they *must* accomplish the climb, otherwise no more subsidy for next year!'

We cannot blame the young climbers who avail themselves of these payments and rewards, still less can we discourage grants made to assist youth in visiting the Alps. But words are not strong enough to express my opinion of the financiers or inciters of what amounts to nothing else than neck-breaking competitions.

I sincerely trust that a stop will soon be put to the dangerous practice alluded to. Another bad sign is the entry of politics into mountaineering, and Alpine Societies.³

It is a curious fact that in spite of the great expense of mountaineering as a whole, I am told that membership of the European Alpine Clubs has increased. Our own numbers are

³ Cf. *R.M.* liv, pp. 1-2.

very slightly down, but, in other respects, I hope I may say that the Club is flourishing: the JOURNAL is as splendid as ever, and a tremendous amount of credit is due to the Editor and to the Honorary Secretary, Mr. Sydney Spencer, who, after his long term of efficient service as Secretary, will become Vice-President. Great credit is also due to the Assistant Secretary for his assiduity and courtesy in the business of the Club. So much for the material prosperity of the Club.

There is another point of view which I should just like to mention. It is the moral aspect and effect of the sport which we support. This, I am glad to say, is at last being generally acknowledged. As an instance of this I would mention that about a month ago I went as usual at Cambridge to the morning service in King's College Chapel, where the Dean was preaching. He is not a mountaineer in any sense of the word, but I was delighted to hear what he said. After taking a text which referred to the hills, he began his sermon as follows:

'Of physical feats and recreations, there can be no doubt which stands first in honour. It is climbing. The tale of tragedy upon the mountains is long and grim; yet we do not condemn climbing; nor do we, who have not the nerve to attempt it, deny its grandeur among the crowd of pastimes. It rivals all others in the quality of its satisfactions. There's the exercise itself, strenuous above all, employing not only every muscle, but the higher factors of decisions, devisings and endurance: there's the glory of the vistas by the way; there's the exhilaration of height and of going higher, and the delight of an achievement which sets one on the pinnacles of earth; and there's the human longing to see over the other side, and to stare, as discoverers, to the margins beyond.'

He then made his words a parable of moral training and development. This, I am sure you will agree, is a very extraordinary testimony to the purity of our sport, and I hope that the Alpine Club will continue to promote this pursuit to the very best of its energies, handing down the tradition which we now hold to our future members and to those that come after us:

λαμπάδια ἔχοντες διαδώσουσιν ἀλλήλοις.

I must close by thanking the Club most heartily for its kindness in electing me its President and leader during the past three years.