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Green funds available

Do you have an idea on how to help your local environment but don't know how to fund it? Do you need assistance protecting and restoring the native vegetation on your property or stabilising your creek bank?

The Australian Government Envirofund is a Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) initiative that is helping communities, groups and individuals undertake local projects aimed at conserving biodiversity and sustainable resource use.

Funding is now available from a few hundred dollars up to \$30,000. Communities can use the funds to undertake a diverse range of projects.

Regional Bushcare facilitator Gary Varga emphasised that whilst Envirofund is open to all, it is seeking to encourage community groups and individuals who have previously not taken advantage of NHT funding. Envirofund offers the opportunity to become active in conserving and restoring aspects of the environment important to individual landholders.

'Projects can involve con-

trolling stock access to watercourses, planting native vegetation for habitat protection, stabilising sand dunes or river banks, demonstration trials for new farming or fishing practices or raising awareness,' Mr Varga said. 'This program is targeted at small scale, manageable community projects that can be completed within twelve months.'

In the last Envirofund round, Brunswick Catchment Forest Landcare Group secured a grant of \$13,312 for weed control, revegetation and fencing materials. The grant is matched by a dedicated band of volunteers who contribute in-kind labour.

Closing date for applications is July 4. Interested parties are encouraged to get in early if they need assistance in preparing their Envirofund application forms

Further information, guidelines and application forms for the Envirofund are available at www.nht.gov.au, or ring the NHT information line 1800 065 823; Ros Elliott, Brunswick Landcare Coordinator 6684 5428; or Gary Varga 6680 8329.

Story by JANET HAWLEY

Tree amigos

They may have started out as a bunch of “ferals, freaks and ratbags” – vilified, beaten and arrested as they dug in and risked all to hold back the loggers.

But after 14 years, the North East Forest Alliance has at last emerged victorious – with the gongs to seal it.

FOR HOURS I FOLLOW DAILAN Pugh's large bare feet, treading and wading behind this gentle giant and tribal elder of the eco-warriors as he glides deeper into the rainforest he knows so intimately.

He pauses beside a 1000-year-old brush box tree – its immense girth studded with orange fungi ears and tangled with vines – thrusting into the canopy. Possums leap from tree hollows, plate-eyed owls hoot.

Pugh seems like an old-growth tree himself, with his huge stature, mossy beard, calm strength and inner rings of learning.

Dailan is the son of the late artist Clifton Pugh, but outside conservation circles, where he's admired, and the timber industry, where he's often hated but ultimately respected, he's little known and he prefers it that way.

The 47-year-old is the quiet central player in an extraordinary, multi-layered saga of how a network of people initially dismissed as “a bunch of ferals, freaks, hippies and ratbags” saved the rainforests and old-growth forests of north-east NSW.

Finally, after 14 years of protracted courtroom battles and on-the-ground, sometimes life-threatening campaigns, Pugh's “tribe”, the North East Forest Alliance (NEFA), can claim





At loggerheads:
(main picture) Dailan
Pugh in Whian Whian
State Forest; (far left)
protesters, including
Ian Cohen, now an
MLC (close-up photo
top left), occupy
a tripod in an
attempt to block
loggers gaining entry
to Chaelundi State
Forest in 1991.

MARC GERRITSON; RICK STEVENS/FAIRFAX PHOTO LIBRARY (2)

victory. In March, as a pre-election promise, NSW Premier Bob Carr said 15 "icon" areas of north-east forest (about 65,000 hectares) would be incorporated into national parks.

Says Pugh: "It means NEFA has now saved 725,000 hectares of forests, more than doubling national parks in this region and thereby stopping the old-growth logging here. What we've won was beyond our wildest dreams when we began."

Those beginnings sprang from the Aquarius Festival at Nimbin in 1973, when flower-power hippies gathered to celebrate peace, love and freedom, romped naked in fields and rivers, sang, smoked dope, smiled, talked and dreamed.

Many stayed on, seeking a self-sufficient, alternative lifestyle in the balmy climate and seductive landscape of rainforest valleys, volcanic mountains, wild streams and glorious waterfalls. More left the city to join them, including well-educated professionals with multiple skills, seeking a sea change before the expression became a cliché.

It often takes fresh eyes to recognise a solution to an old and overwhelming problem, and that's what happened when the new settlers moved in.

"It was so obvious that logging this region's prized timber – which had gone on for generations – was an unsustainable industry, and in a decade there'd be nothing left, so there'd be no jobs for loggers anyway," says Pugh. "Stopping logging just moved that issue forward, and meanwhile saved the remaining forests forever."

WEAR BOOTS, YOU'LL NEED BOOTS, PUGH had told me, but he's barefoot this early morning as he starts the big walk in the newly saved "icon" area of Whian Whian State Forest. In the misty green yonder lie the townships of Terania Creek and Nimbin and, beyond them, Mount Warning. He strides to the edge of the lookout above the Minyon Falls that skydive into the rainforest valley deep below. That's where we're walking, he tells me, pointing to the base of the falls.

My foray with Field Marshal Pugh, as he's affectionately called, is punctuated by lectures on the life cycle of strangler figs and the mating habits of pouch frogs, snacks of red berries from a small palm tree, and the occasional stop to pluck leeches off his feet and my neck. "Only a real nuisance when they suck onto your eyeballs, then you have to wait till they drop off," he chuckles.

We are walking in an area formerly known as the Big Scrub, once the biggest area of untouched lowland rainforest in Australia, stretching 75,000 hectares from Ballina and Byron Bay on the coast, inland to Lismore and Terania Creek.

"The old-growth trees in it were up to 2500 years old," Pugh says. "They're crucially important, because the hollows that form in the trunks when branches fall off and termites invade provide habitats for 300 species, like yellow-bellied gliders, sooty owls, many possums and parrots. And they're irreplaceable – you can't grow another 2500-year-old tree next week."

In the mid-1800s, cedar-cutters cleared the area for dairy farming. In just 20 years, the Big Scrub was slaughtered, along with the old-growth trees which the loggers regarded as rubbish. Today, only 300 hectares of the original rainforest remain, in small patches.

Pugh grew up playing barefoot in the forest at Dunmoochin, his father's artists' colony at Cottles Bridge north of Melbourne. "It was dry forest that had been logged for firewood for Melbourne, and the forest regrew with us. We had countless animals: possums, kangaroos. I slept with a wombat at the bottom of my bed as a hot-water bottle."

His childhood dream was to be a zoologist, but he was always drawing and ended up as an artist like his father. He moved north permanently in 1978, after becoming enamoured of the shapes and colours of rainforests during the Aquarius Festival. He first lived on a commune in Terania, "running an ethical general store by day and, every night, painting the small rainforest flowers beside a kerosene lamp". He began to explore the forests, drawing the trees and animals, and the forest became his studio.

AT THE END OF TERANIA VALLEY LIVED HUGH and Nan Nicholson, also from Melbourne, a teacher and his botanist wife who'd bought a disused dairy farm overgrown with lantana in 1974. "We arrived in an old Holden, with five goats on the back seat, a cat on the parcel rack, two cages on the roof holding chickens and ducks, and a tent," recalls Hugh.

"We had no money, but a lot of energy," adds Nan, "and the beauty of the surrounding rainforest sustained us."

The Nicholsons built their own home, ran a rainforest nursery for 20 years, and are now compiling the sixth volume of their book, *Australian Rainforest Plants*, which has sold about 100,000 copies.

In 1979, Hugh met a party of loggers in the neighbouring state-owned rainforest, who said they intended to clearfell Terania Creek Forest.

"Our first reaction was to cave in to the almighty Forestry Commission and sell up," says Hugh. "But we began talking with other new settlers and decided there was no way we would let them plunder the rainforest – we'd fight the bastards."

Nan continues: "Protesters came in droves, and within a day, they'd organised a highly efficient camp in the bottom paddock, with hot showers, a bread oven, kitchen tent, healing tent, childminding. People wore colour-coded bands to denote their roles."

Over the next six weeks, the forest location often looked like a *Midsummer Night's Dream* hippie pantomime. The protesters were called, among other names, ferals, freaks, dole-bludging, pot-smoking, bead-wearing hippies and rainbow greenies, as they blocked the road and played flutes, mandolins and drums. They danced, sang, wailed and chanted to the frustrated police and furious loggers wielding chainsaws and still cutting down huge trees.

Hundreds of police were trucked to the area, politicians and timber industry officials flew in,

pro bono lawyers, academics and supportive conservationists arrived, the media turned up. "We were a bit naive then, because we were learning how to do a blockade," says Nan. "But we were also deadly serious, as protesters sitting in trees or milling in front of bulldozers deliberately put their lives on the line."

Dozens of protesters were dragged off and arrested, but Nan says: "Several police had a soft spot for our cause, and bought our hand-printed T-shirts to wear under their uniforms. Some of them even lined up for head and neck massages – there's quite a famous photograph of that."

Many protesters "blooded" at Terania Creek went on to fight at other campaigns, "and we crap on about the glory days, like a troop of green Anzacs," admits a veteran.

Terania Creek Forest was eventually saved, and the growing public controversy led to the historic decision by the Wran government, in 1982, to stop logging in a large proportion of the state's rainforests. But the loggers' chainsaws continued in other disputed forests – which conservationists argued should have been defined as rainforest – as well as in old-growth forests.

DAILAN PUGH COULDN'T ABIDE THE logging – or "murder and mayhem" in the forests, as he calls it – and decided it would only go ahead "over my dead body". In 1989, with a group of like-minded activists, he set up NEFA.

It's a grassroots alliance of individuals and groups, who work together to protect old-growth forests, rainforests, endangered species and wilderness. "The marvel of NEFA is that its people range from dreadlocked ferals to mechanics and barristers – and everyone respects each other," says Aiden Ricketts, who was a drop-out law graduate during the early blockades and is now a law lecturer.

To the frustration of those who wanted to sue it, NEFA has never been a formal organisation with a formal membership or constitution. It's never had paid staff, assets or an office (people work from home or local environment centres), yet it has been extraordinarily effective. People volunteer time and an amazing variety of skills, from academic research to acrobatic dancing on the arm of a cherry picker, to running pirate two-way radio communications, to setting up the NEFA website. (Click on www.nefa.org.au to check out the "Intercontinental De-luxe Guide to Blockading": with tips on tree-sitting techniques – including the tripod, the cantilever, the monopole and Star of David – and lock-ons.)

In 1990, after Clifton Pugh died, Dailan decided to put aside his own artistic ambitions and use his inheritance to work full-time for the alliance. Pugh and another key co-ordinator, John Corkill (then a teacher, later an environmental consultant and Greens

candidate), soon became brilliant self-taught green bureaucrats.

Aiden Ricketts sees them thus: "Dailan has immense scientific and ground-truth knowledge. He turns up barefoot at high-level government meetings and everyone listens because he always knows more than the experts.



"State Forests regarded old-growth trees as dying and a waste of space. One forester aptly described this as pinus envy – envy of pine plantations."



His focus is fascinating in a long campaign, because he never loses sight of the objective. He's very calm, spiritual and determined; he doesn't have an enemy, only an objective.

"John, on the other hand, is an amazingly skilled and aggressive amateur lawyer, whose eyes burn with the thrill of beating the enemy along the way to reaching the objective."

The bush scientist and bush lawyer made a great team. With increasing sophistication and ingenuity, NEFA repeatedly took on the government and Forestry Commission in simultaneous pincer actions of forest blockades and challenges in the law courts and lobby rooms – and mostly won.

Pugh concedes that it's been an evolving battle: "We had to learn new skills and tactics all along the way. We got better at building bigger, more innovative blockades to delay logging, but the police found quicker ways of pulling them down. We found various legal

avenues to pursue in the courts, but the government kept changing the laws to close these off. These days it's more political, trying to get results through government."

When NEFA began, State Forests of NSW (then known as the Forestry Commission) "were still in the dark ages," says Pugh. "State Forests had long been a law unto themselves. No other department, such as National Parks and Wildlife, dared challenge them.

"In 1989, I did a review of all State Forests



Action stations (clockwise from above): at the Terania Creek protests in 1979, police relax with a massage before getting back to business; Hugh and Nan Nicholson with children Elke and Terri and a sign of the times; and a "captured" bulldozer.

management areas in NSW, and was amazed how backward their resource management was. Their information base was appalling. Their maps only showed trees that were commercially useful. They had no data on old-growth, no idea what other plants and animals were in the forests. If you look at a 1989 management plan, it would say, '10 years previously, a university class was in one spot of the forest ... and found these species'. That was the sum total of their information!

"They regarded old-growth trees as senescent, ie, dying, and a waste of space. Chopping them down was called timber stand improvement. Their aim was to convert native forests to single-age regrowth stands which were easier

to manage. One forester aptly described it as pinus envy – envy of pine plantations.”

Pugh was now studying a stream of university botany and biology courses, and obsessively devouring scientific papers.

NEFA'S FIRST MOVE WAS TO IDENTIFY ALL major stands of old-growth forest in NSW. A fauna consultant was employed, who undertook an extensive survey of endangered species of flora and fauna. The next step was protecting the forests. Pugh knew of two earlier court cases where locals had successfully taken State Forests to court to prove that an environmental impact statement



(EIS) was needed before logging took place.

“I felt, ‘How could you log any old-growth forest without doing an EIS?’ Our aim was to systematically take State Forests to court over every old-growth area to make sure they did an EIS before logging.” He adds: “The myth that [Neville] Wran saved all the rainforests was a major motivation for me. Wran transferred 100,000 hectares of icon rainforests into National Parks, but other areas were left available for logging. The battle to save them was made harder by the public perception they’d been saved.”

In 1990, Chaelundi blew up. “It was our seminal battle, like the Somme,” says Ricketts. Chaelundi, south-west of Grafton, had been identified as one of the highest-value old-growth forests in the country, with the highest density of rare and endangered species.

When NEFA learned Chaelundi was to be logged, it immediately went into its now-well-practised pincer action. A blockade was set up on the road to delay loggers’ access; meanwhile, Corkill, acting as litigant and aided by barrister Tim Robertson (Geoffrey’s brother), obtained an injunction from the Land and Environment Court, which halted logging until an EIS was prepared.

State Forests completed an EIS and restarted logging in 1991. NEFA considered the EIS “highly inaccurate”, and the battle was really on. Over the next five months, NEFA staged “an almighty blockade, real trench-warfare stuff”, while Corkill and Robertson

were fighting on a different tack in court.

Ricketts and a group of friends had been building pole houses at Toonumbar, near Kyogle. He recalls: “Our mob arrived at Chaelundi with four-wheel-drive trucks, crowbars, chains, winches, toolkits, and said, ‘Right, let’s build a blockade.’”



the “old-style, polite, holy NVA [non-violent action] where a mob of people sit passively on the road like Gandhi, then get dragged away and arrested,” says Ricketts. “That only leads to a lot of fines and boring media, and is ineffective. The only way to make NVA value-added is to place people in direct life-

threatening situations that are so difficult it takes police hours to get the person out safely.”

Amid the chaos of frayed and furious tempers, NEFA always had an appointed bystander, like Ricketts, who remained calm, and informed police and timber workers that if they moved a protester in a way that caused injury or death, they would be criminally negligent. A “Feral Productions” video crew would also record the scene.

Ricketts, who lived in the forest for five months, says: “NEFA insists on doing things correctly – we even initiated a protocol with police, so we all knew the rules of engagement at a blockade. And we never allowed protesters to spike logs, damage equipment, or use violence; that’s unstrategic and brings negative results.”

Chaelundi soon became a micro-village, as 1000-plus protesters arrived, and was well organised. At the front gate camp were people like Ricketts, good talking heads to deal with media, Forestry and

police. Inside the forest were more camps with sleeping quarters, teepees, a cafe, solar panels for power, a dam. Everyone was on a chore roster. Many protesters lived on communities, so were practised at being enterprising, frugal, sharing and, importantly, were good at problem solving.

“Right up the back was feral camp, for the hard-core anarchist dreadlocked mob,” Ricketts recalls. “They are great: they’ll endure any hardship, live on nothing in freezing forests and perform fearless guerilla feats.”

One day, a busload of “green grannies” arrived to join the protest in front of the bulldozers, sitting on plastic chairs with their knitting.

“A few loonies and camp followers always turn up, too, but most come for the right reasons,” concludes Pugh.

In his book *Green Fire*, Ian Cohen, a NEFA blockade veteran and now Greens MLC, recalls Chaelundi thus: “A dynamic combination of old-guard green activists, locals and new protesters, with the keenness of youth. Included in the latter were the ‘punks for the forest’, a rare and wonderful breed of wild young men and women, outrageous to the extreme, who shocked everyone from police to protesters. Wild and often drunk, they have surprised everyone with their outlandish humour and bravery. Under the rough exterior of rags and skull earrings, nose rings, boots and beer are some of the finest, most honest people that I have encountered (when they were sober).”

One day, a busload of “green grannies” arrived to join the protest, sitting on plastic chairs in front of the bulldozers with their knitting.



Tree musketeers: frontmen Aiden Ricketts (above) and John Corkill (top); a protester hangs on for dear life at Chaelundi, 1991 (above right); police lay down the “rules of engagement” to activists at Terania Creek, 1979.

Riggers arrived from working on film sets and started setting up big “tripods”: long poles are lashed together, and a person sits on the top, often with a noose around his neck, attached to a tree branch. If the tripod is moved, the person could die.

“One guy sitting in a tripod can delay logging as effectively as 200 people milling on the road,” says Ricketts, “because the only way to remove him is by bringing in a crane or cherry picker. Fortuitously, we discovered a stash of concrete road pipes in the forest, and saw what a great barricade they’d make. They were three metres long and wide enough for a person to fit inside, so we dug holes and planted them across the roads, with a person chained inside.

“Soon we had 42 pipes dug in, in six different battlements, as well as tripods and cables strung between trees ... It got bigger and bigger.”

As loggers’ bulldozers and trucks stopped at the blockade, activists locked themselves to the vehicles with bike chains and padlocks around their necks and wrists. NEFA wanted none of

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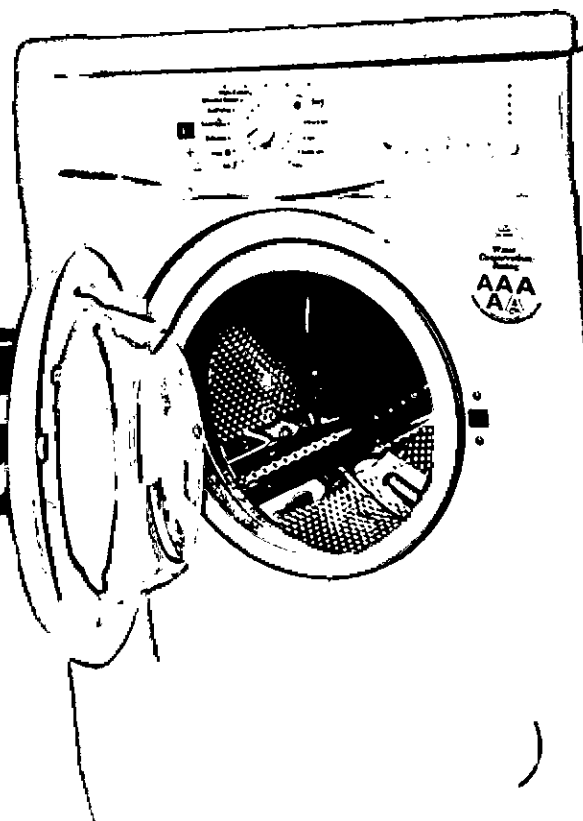
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Meanwhile, on the legal front, Corkill was having long conferences with lawyers over how to bring an action once logging restarted. "We decided to use the National Parks and Wildlife Act, which stated that Forestry needed a special licence from National Parks if logging might harm endangered species. Absurdly, National Parks had never dared take on Forestry, so we went to court to prove they had to do this, and won."

But this was only one victory, and the overall campaign continued. Over the next four years, "it was a wild and exhilarating ride", says Corkill, as NEFA activists were constantly involved in blockades and court cases, getting media coverage and getting arrested, lobbying politicians and bureaucrats.

Pugh stresses that NEFA was never totally anti-logging: it accepts limited selective logging, and has long argued that forestry needs restructuring to run as a sustainable industry. "All the old-generation loggers will tell you the forests are over-logged, and Forestry has been fudging the figures for years about how much timber is really left," he says. "Loggers today know the timber is running out, and a lot aren't happy with the way the industry is managed, but it's a matter of hanging onto a job."

EARLY ONE MORNING IN 1992, NEFA activists staged a bold paramilitary coup at the Forestry Commission's Sydney headquarters, locked the building, took over the commissioner's office and used his fax machine to issue *The People's Commission for the Forests New Charter*, a document outlining their vision for NSW's old-growth forests.

Ricketts: "We were accused of being terrorists, and the mainstream environmental movement clung to their chandeliers and went, 'Oh my God, these people are so outrageous, we cannot endorse this!'"

Increasingly, the environment, forests, logging and woodchipping became fierce political issues. In 1996, a year after Bob Carr was elected with the promise of being a green premier, a moratorium on logging was declared while a comprehensive regional analysis (CRA) of the state's forests was undertaken.

NEFA, National Parks, State Forests and the timber industry were involved in the process, aimed at scientifically documenting all types of native forests, the flora and fauna, as well as establishing adequate percentages to be protected as National Parks while logging was permitted in other areas.

Pugh and a NEFA team worked obsessively on the CRA process, then, in 1998, "left in disgust when Carr only handed over three-quarters of the promised areas into National Parks, and sold out the rest to placate the timber industry and safeguard marginal seats. We endorsed what he handed over, but said the blockades were back on."

Pugh was by now suffering burnout, so Susie Russell and Carmel Flint took over the role of NEFA co-ordinators, pushing for the remaining 15 icon areas to become national parks – an ambition which has finally been realised.

Ricketts observes philosophically: "Within a social movement, like peace or environment, you usually don't succeed. You have to live with non success, or partial success, as the best you'll ever get. So it's an incredible feeling to finally win peace in all these forests."

THE IMPACT OF THE NEFA "TRIBE" EXTENDED FAR beyond the forests. It was a subculture that fed an entire regional movement of social and cultural

renewal. Says Ricketts, now associate lecturer in the School of Law and Justice at Southern Cross University (SCU) in Lismore: "It changed lives, and indeed saved lives of some characters who were hovering on the edge."

Ironically, too, the forest campaigns proved a fantastic source of job training. Many so-called dole-bludging hippies learned practical and organisational skills, and gained a sense of empowerment and direction. They went on to study law, environmental science, media, architecture, naturopathy, make films, write books and songs, start bands, galleries, nurseries, organic food shops and restaurants. Some even went into local and state government.

"The network of contacts is huge once you're in the NEFA tribe," says Ricketts. "There's now a whole generation of NEFA children who've sprung from relationships that started at the blockades."

So what does an old activist do now that he's given up blockading and got a proper job? Ricketts is setting up a public interest advocacy course at SCU to teach people activist skills for any cause, based on the NEFA experience. He's also written a chapter

"I get a bit cross when politicians like Wran and Carr say they saved the forests. No, you didn't – the people saved the forests."

documenting NEFA's political, social and artistic influence for the book *Belonging in the Rainbow Region*, recently published by Southern Cross University Press.

Pugh and Corkill were both awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in this year's Australia Day honours list for their work in forest conservation. Says Corkill, laughing: "We've gone from being arrested, vilified, topping hate lists and threatened we'd have the shit bashed out of us, to now being given medals! It's very gratifying."

Pugh is now painting again. "People say an artist only has 10 really good years in a career," he says, and hopes to hit his run now. "I never regarded myself as a hippie or a feral, though others might have thought I was. I call myself a politically non-aligned conservationist. But I'm very fond of the hippies and ferals, because we couldn't have done it without them."

"I take my hat off to the people who went on blockades, and spent months in forests in often very primitive conditions. They underwent huge traumas about loggers coming in and bashing them up, police dragging them off to be arrested, fined or jailed. They weren't a rabble – they were committed to making a difference. Some might have been on the dole, but they were working as hard as in any job. I reckon they've repaid more than they got, by saving all those forests."

Corkill adds: "I get a bit cross when politicians like Wran and Carr say they saved the forests. No, you didn't – the people saved the forests. We put our lives on the line, put thousands of hours into blockades, legal challenges, and put environmental awareness onto the social agenda."

"One of the last things Milo Dunphy, that pioneer conservationist, said to me before he died was: 'Please thank the ferals.' Milo's era of conservationists had campaigned in their own, more polite way, but he knew the old ways were no longer effective. He laughed and said: 'Thank God for the ferals.'" E