

# Remington Rifle Cane

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There is very little known and less written about the Remington Rifle Cane, primarily because so few of them were manufactured. Collectors and scholars have not had the opportunity to obtain and study the numerous specimens that are required in order to make the necessary comparisons that would enable them to catalogue the subtle differences that are evident in each of the different rifle cane models.

I have been a serious collector of Remington firearms for over 40 years and have been fortunate enough, over that period of time, to have accumulated quite a number of these wonderful and unique American oddities. When I started to compare these rifle canes with one another subtle variations began to become quite apparent.

Like most collectors, I have relied on information obtained in books, articles, and advertisements to learn about special items that hold my interest. I found it most disappointing that for the most part any concise information in regard to the Remington Rifle Cane was seriously lacking and in some instances totally erroneous. It is my intention to add to what is already known about these scarce oddities as well as to correct some of the misinformation that has heretofore been represented as factual.

Insomuch as the inventor, John F. Thomas, called his invention a Rifle Cane, I will also use that designation when referring to what we have previously called the Remington Cane Gun.

## THE INVENTOR

John F. Thomas was born in 1835 in Jordanville, New York, a small village located approximately eight miles southeast of Ilion, New York. He started working for E. Remington & Sons as an apprentice gunsmith in 1849. He must have been quite an exceptional young man because in 1858, at the age of 23, he was elected president of the village in which he resided. In 1866, Thomas, now age 31, had risen to the position of Master Mechanic at the Remington factory.

By the end of the Civil War, Remington had greatly expanded its factory and product lines. This expansion continued through the 1870s. In 1880, Thomas, now age 45,



was appointed Superintendent of the Remington Agricultural Works.

In 1888, E. Remington & Sons entered into a bankruptcy. A new company under new ownership was formed and renamed Remington Arms Company. It may have been at this time that Thomas left their employ. Records show that in 1891, he bought the opera house in Ilion and served as its manager and proprietor until 1902.

John F. Thomas died in 1907 at the age of 73. Coincidentally, he is buried in Ilion, New York in the same cemetery as that of the Remington family.

## THE REMINGTON RIFLE CANE

The concept of disguising a weapon to look like a cane or some other harmless looking everyday item was not a new one. The Europeans had been making guns, swords and other items disguised as canes for quite a time prior to Mr. Thomas receiving his patent for a "Rifle Cane" on February 9, 1858.

One of the characteristics that made the Remington rifle cane unique was that its entire firing mechanism and striker were totally encased and *hidden* inside the upper shaft of the cane. The trigger is a nonconspicuous button located on the bottom side of the handle's shaft. Mr. Thomas claimed in his patent papers that his invention was "safe, cheap and effective." His cane was also much lighter than the



Figure 1. Assortment of sword canes with a “flicker” cane in the center.

all steel canes that were available (i.e., the Day’s Patent Cane). It weighed from 16 to 24 ounces, looked more like a true gentleman’s cane, was less cumbersome, and was not as obvious as were the other cane guns that were on the market at that time. It was also covered with a thin hard rubber coating know as gutta purcha.

In their 1866 catalog, Remington advertised that their cane was “light and portable, but at the same is nearly as efficient in point of Range, Accuracy and Penetration as a Rifle of the same length”. My personal belief is that this was a bit of “creative advertising”.

DATES OF MANUFACTURE

The Remington Rifle Cane was manufactured from 1858 until 1888. Remington produced three basic models, which I have classified by caliber. It is interesting to note that the cartridge model rifle cane was the first cartridge handgun to be produced by Remington.

It appears that each of the models were given a serial number range of their own, beginning with the number “1”. I have included the conversion models under the percussion model category, because they started out as percussion mod-



Figure 2. Blow gun cane.

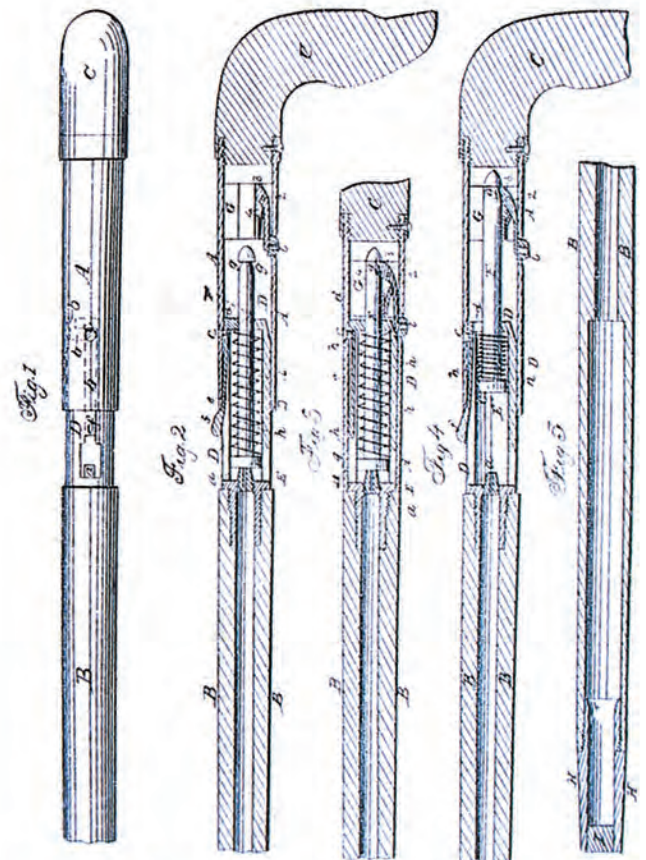


Figure 3. Remington Patent Drawings showing internal mechanism.



els and bear the serial number that was given to them when they were originally manufactured.

The following serial number ranges are approximate and are based on my observations over the past three decades:

- .31 Perc. and Conv. Models—1858-1865  
(Serial No. 1-500)
- .32 rf Cartridge Models—1866-1888  
(Serial no. 1-2000)
- .22 rf Cartridge Models—1866-1888  
(Serial no. 1-2000)

#### MARKINGS AND SERIAL NUMBERING

There seems to be little uniformity in the placement of the marking applied on these canes. They were struck very lightly on the gutta purcha, but the markings do not *always* appear in the same area on all models. However, markings *most often* will be found where the handle shaft meets the barrel shaft.

Serial numbers can also be found on the upper part of the barrel shaft where it meets the handle shaft; they may also be found on some of the ferrules, especially



Figure 4. Remington rifle cane with ball and claw handle and Day's Patent cane gun.

on the percussion models. I have on occasion found serial numbers marked on the underside of the handles where they meet the silver plated brass escutcheon ring as well as on barrels where they meet the ferrule.

There are three different markings found on these rifle canes:

#### *Percussion and Conversion Models*

J.F. Thomas

Patent

Feb'y 9, 1858

Ilion, N. Y.

#### *.32 rf and .22 rf Models*

Remington & Sons

Ilion, N. Y.

Patent Feb'y 9, 1858

#### *.32 rf and .22 rf Models*

Remington & Sons

Ilion, N. Y.

Pat. Extend Feb. 9, 1872

I believe that only approximately 500 of the first .32 rim fire cartridge models have the Remington & Sons—Ilion, N.Y.—Patent Feb'y 9, 1858 patent markings.

## REMINGTON'S RIFLE CANE.

No. 1. Using Metallic Cartridge Size No. 22. Weight 14 oz. Price \$10.00  
 No. 2. Using Metallic Cartridge Size No. 32. " 24 oz. " 10.00  
 Barrel Steel, covered with Vulcanized Rubber.

This arm is new in its construction and character, combining the advantages of a Walking Cane and Rifle. It is light and portable, but at the same time is nearly as efficient in point of Range, Accuracy and Penetration as a Rifle of same length.

No. 1. EXACT SIZE.

#### DIRECTIONS FOR USING.

To load—unscrew the handle or breech from the body of the Cane; insert the Cartridge and replace the handle. Drawing back the handle will cock the piece ready for firing, when pressing upon the trigger knob underneath will discharge it. Care should be taken not to press upon the Trigger Knob, when the piece is being cocked.

The lock case or breech may be closed by slight pressure upon the Spring Sight.

The arm may be charged and carried without danger of accidental explosion as the firing pin does not rest upon the Cartridge.

For hunting or target practice, remove the tip or ferrule at the muzzle. If it is required to use the arm suddenly for self defence, it is not necessary to remove the tip. Clean and oil after firing.

NOTE. If it is desired to remove the lock case for any purpose, slip down the ferrule from the handle; drive out the small pin passing through the handle, which with the Lock Case can be removed.

Figure 5. Remington rifle cane advertisement showing internal mechanism for rim fire cartridges.



Figure 6. Remington rifle cane with rare bulbous handle.



Figure 7. Comparison of long shaft and short shaft handles.

When Remington received their 1872 patent extension, they marked their canes accordingly.

#### TYPES OF HANDLES BY MODEL

There were nine different standard handle configurations provided by Remington for their rifle canes. I have classified these handles by caliber model. The dog's head and right angle handles are the same size and configuration for both the percussion and .32 rf models.

<i>.31 Percussion</i>	<i>.32 rf Model</i>	<i>.22 rf Model</i>
Ball & Claw	Dog's Head (lg)	Dog's Head (sm)
Bulbous	Curved (Long Shaft)	Curved (Long Shaft)
Right Angle	Curved (Short Shaft)	Curved (Short Shaft)
Dog's Head (lg)	Right Angle	

Until recently, little notice was given to the subtle differences in the two different styles of curved handles. One I have designated as the *Curved with the Long Shaft* and the other as *Curved with Short Shaft*. The two handles differ enough that their configurations will speak for themselves when put side by side.

The Remington factory, of course, would do whatever the customer desired as long as they were willing to pay for the service, so it would not be inconceivable to find variations of the above referenced handles. I am aware of both a Right Angle and a Dog's Head handle that are made out of

ivory. I have also inspected what appears to be a factory made Right Angle handle that had been made out of aluminum.

#### CALIBERS:

#### LOADING AND FIRING

First and foremost, I want to stress that there were no .44 caliber or .410 ga. Rifle canes produced by the Remington factory for sale to the public. This is a very common mistake made by the uninformed who have taken a caliber gauge and inserted it into the muzzle of a .31 percussion or .32 r.f. Remington rifle cane to get a caliber reading. I have seen highly respected and knowledgeable dealers advertise Remington rifle canes stating that they were .410 ga. or .44 cal. This mistake is most understandable, especially if the barrel shaft of the cane has become "frozen" to the

handle and there is no way to unscrew the barrel so that the breech of the cane can be observed. None of the percussion models were loaded from the "muzzle" of the cane shaft. They were all loaded from the handle shaft portion of the cane.

Remington rifle canes were produced in three calibers—.31 percussion, .32 rim fire, and .22 rim fire. The latter two were offered in the Remington catalogs in both cartridge and/or shot. I have yet to encounter or hear about any Remington rifle cane barrels that were not rifled and, therefore, must assume that these barrels were intended for both cartridge and/or shot.

The barrel of the rifle cane is rifled and is an insert into the gutta purcha covered brass shaft of the cane. The length of these barrels can vary from about 6 to 10 inches. Screwed onto the end of the cane's shaft is a serrated steel ferrule.

The first model Remington rifle cane was produced in .31 percussion caliber in 1858. The loading of this gun required that the shooter unscrew the handle shaft from the barrel shaft and charge the handle part of the cane with powder and ball (or shot). The handle was then screwed back onto the shaft. The shooter would then either remove a tampon or piece of cork from the end of the ferrule of the cane. Another option would be to unscrew and remove the ferrule. The serrations on the ferrule were no doubt put there for just that purpose.

Firing the gun required that the handle be pulled back to a cocked position while holding onto the shaft of the





Figure 8. Comparison of large dog's head and small dog's head handles.



Figure 9. Different types of period after market (replaced) handles.

cane. A retaining sear that also served as a rear sight would pop up from the shaft of the handle and hold the rifle cane handle in a cocked position. This prevented the handle from moving in a forward motion. This procedure would then expose a percussion cap nipple at the breech so a percussion cap could be seated. The rifle cane was now ready to be fired. All the shooter had to do was aim and press the button trigger on the underside of the cane's handle shaft. Should the shooter desire not to fire the cane after it had been loaded and cocked, all he would have to do is release the pressure on the striker spring by pressing down on the rear sight (retaining sear) and slowly allow the handle and shaft to come back together. Should he desire to put the cane back into action, all he had to do was recock the cane.

It is interesting to note that when in the uncocked position, the striker does not rest on the percussion cap or on the face of the rim fire shell on the cartridge models. This appears to be the only safety factor on this weapon.

### CONVERSIONS

I have examined several Remington percussion rifle canes that have been converted to .32 center fire. All of these conversions were done in the same manner and configuration demonstrating the same very professional workmanship.

Based on these observations, it is my contention that these canes were converted at the Remington factory or by someone under contract for that purpose.

### DIFFERENCES AND VARIATIONS

There are several variations that are evident on these canes that at first glance can help you identify the the percussion and cartridge models without exposing the breech.

*All Remington percussion and conversion rifle canes have an indented ring in the gutta purcha on the barrel shaft part of the cane where it meets the breech.* This feature was carried over to some of the very first .32 rim fire cartridge models. Every one of the early cartridge models that have this indented "ring" bear low double digit serial numbers. These were no doubt transition

models. It appears that the same gutta purcha mold that was used on the percussion models was carried over to a very few (less than 100) early cartridge canes. The later .32 rim fire canes do not have this indented ring.



Figure 10. Caliber gauge inserted into cane muzzle.



Figure 11. Comparison of cane shafts with and without indented ring.

## TRIGGER STYLES

There are also very distinct variations in the patterns on the button triggers. Triggers on the very early percussion models have a checkered pattern. The latter percussion models have triggers with a concentric ring design in which the center ring is convex (raised). Triggers on the .32 rf and .22 rf canes, although different in size, have the same style concentric ring configuration with the exception of the center ring which is concave (indented).

## FERRULES

The ferrules attached to the muzzle of the canes do not only differ in length but also in their styles and serration patterns. Some of the ferrules are longer than others. The knurling is varied in size and style. To date, I have not been able to com-

pile enough data to make a definitive evaluation as to the chronological order of these ferrules, but at first glance it seems that the percussion model rifle canes have shorter fer-



Figure 12. .22 rim fire Dog's head with barrel insert.

rules than those of the cartridge models. The percussion cane ferrules are also all stamped with the early J. F. Thomas patent date and serial number.

## SIGHTS

There seems to be no real conformity to the front post sights on these canes. Some are on a steel ring attached to the tip of the cane while others had their front post sight attached directly to the cane shaft. A great many others have no front sight at all.

## SPECIAL ORDER CANES

Any special order Remington Rifle Cane is an oddity among oddities. They are rarely encountered and should be considered most desirable.

A Remington rifle cane could be ordered in any color you desired as long as it was brown. The shades of brown vary greatly from light brown to very dark brown. Some are so dark they appear to be black. I am sure that the variations of these colors are due to exposure to the sun and outdoor elements as well as to the extent of use and or abuse of the owners. The original color of the cane can be seen when the silver plated escutcheon ring is removed and the protected area underneath is exposed.

However, there is always one exception to every rule! I am fortunate to have in my collection a most unusual special factory order cane. It is coral in color. Over the years, a few (three that I know of) unique coral colored gutta purcha Remington rifle canes have been found. They have all been .32 rim fire models fitted with the long shafted curved handle. The one in my collection is numbered 742 and is stamped with the extended patent date of 1872.

Another unusual special order cane is a .22 rim fire dog's head model that was made up as a "take down" cane. The barrel shaft unscrews at the middle so it breaks down into three pieces. It has the extended 1872 patent date and is serial number 1558, which I consider a relatively high number indicating a very late manufacture.



Figure 13. Loading the .31 percussion rifle cane.





Figure 14. Percussion action.

to the .32 rf Remington dog's head rifle cane. Though it bears no markings, I have compared the dog's head handle on this walking stick with several dog's head handles on Remington rifle canes that I have in my collection. It is identical in size and configuration as those found on the Remington canes. There is no doubt that they came from the same mold and that this cane was either made up at the Remington factory or by one of their contractors.

#### FAULTS AND FRAILTIES

The thin layer of the gutta purcha coating applied to the brass shafts of these canes is very fragile and subject to cracking. Extreme care should be taken not to drop or bang these canes. The brass liners of the cane shafts are threaded on the end to accommodate a tapered ferrule. This area near



Figure 15. Loading the .32 rf cartridge rifle cane.



Figure 16. Remington rifle cane converted to .32 center fire.

Then there is the "Remington Cane" that is not a gun. This is a dark brown gutta purcha dog's head walking stick that looks identical

the ferrule is usually where stress cracks in the gutta purcha most frequently occur.

A tampion, piece of cork, or some type of cover was needed for the end of the ferrule to avoid obstructions such as dirt, mud, and stones from entering and blocking the barrel shaft.

The firing mechanism is rather delicate and could be subject to malfunctions and possible misfires through abuse as well as parts fatigue. After continuous use, the striker retaining sear (which also serves as the rear sight) can become rather worn on its retaining edge. This will stop the cane from staying in a cocked position and could also cause the cane to fire prematurely.

One of the most visible problems with the Remington rifle cane is that the barrel shaft is subject to warping. A shell extraction system is nonexistent and a ramrod is needed to remove the empty cartridge casings. Should you miss hitting your target, you will still have a rather nice looking club in which to defend yourself.

#### RARITY

Listed below are the handle types by rarity:

1. Bulbous	.31 Perc.
2. Ball and Claw	.31 Perc.
3. Dog's Head	.31 Perc.
4. Right Angle	.31 Perc.
5. Conversion models	.32 rf (all handles)
6. Dog's Head (lg)	.32 rf
7. Dog's Head (sm)	.22 rf
8. Curved (long shaft)	.32 rf
Curved (long shaft)	.22 rim fire
9. Curved (short shaft)	.32 rf
Curved (short shaft)	.22 rim fire
10. Custom handle	All calibers

#### CARE, HANDLING AND RESORTATION

Many Remington rifle canes have been seriously damaged or destroyed by carelessness, abuse, and/or just plain stupidity by their owners. The most common problems with these canes will most often occur with the gutta purcha. I have found that the best protection for the gutta purcha is to rub it down with a very light oil. *Never use abrasives of any kind to polish these canes.* The markings on these canes are usually very faint. Even on the best examples the markings were very lightly applied. An application of some light oil will help bring them out.

A coating of a matching color shoe crjeme can be applied to give your cane some protection as well as help blend in faded areas. Use a very soft cloth to polish the cane to a shine. Do not apply polish to the markings as it will just fill in the letters and make them disappear.

I strongly recommend that you do not attempt to take the firing mechanism apart, or remove the handle from the shaft. On most of these canes, the handles are fitted onto a wooden peg and held in place with a steel pin. If this pin is not exposed it may be found under the escutcheon ring. Damage may occur to the delicate gutta purcha when trying to hammer out this steel pin, so it is suggested that it not be removed. Some of these handles were threaded and screwed onto the cane shaft. Screwed-on handles are not commonly encountered, so be very careful when trying to "unscrew" them.

If you find the firing mechanism on your cane a little stiff, it may be due to hardened grease or rust; a little solvent and a coating of light oil should resolve the problem. Another difficulty you might encounter is your cane not staying in the cocked position. This is usually due to a worn retaining sear. Again, I strongly urge that you do not attempt to disassemble the firing mechanism. Even if your cane is not working properly, you are better off leaving it alone than putting it in harms way by trying to take it apart. Periodically add a few drops of light oil to the action for lubrication and rust avoidance.

Do not store your Remington rifle canes in a gun case that has a rubber or rubberized interior. The rubber inside these cases negatively interacts the gutta purcha and may cause severe discoloration. Should this occur, rub the gutta purcha down with a fine oil and let it sit for about a week. Wipe it dry and apply a coat of high quality shoe crême to restore its luster. Avoid filling in any marking.

Vern Eklund has had great success repairing gutta purcha and was kind enough to share his formula with me for this presentation. I have not tried this procedure myself, but I have seen some of Vern's work and can attest to how good it looks.

Vern conferred with Allied Resin Corp. of Weymouth, Mass. who suggested using Resin—Arcon 2795 or DER 331 (made by Dow Chemical). The Arcon is fairly thin and the DER is rather viscous. These are two-part mixtures so curing agent will also be needed; Allied Chemical suggested Ver-samid 140 by Henkel Corp.

Mix the resin and curing agent (about 50/50) along with an artist's oil of appropriate color. (Vern found that Grumbacher artist oils work quite well.) If you are filling in a crack, apply the epoxy mixture very carefully along the crack and clamp the pieces together as required. Be careful not to over apply the epoxy. It can be a real mess to work with. Also, be especially careful when applying pressure to the clamp—the gutta purcha is quite thin, especially around the trigger housing. If you have a missing piece of gutta purcha, Vern suggest that a dam or mold may be required to contain the epoxy mixture being applied.



Figure 17. Comparison of the different styles of button triggers.





Figure 18. Comparison of the different styles of ferrules.



Figure 19. Different types of front sights.

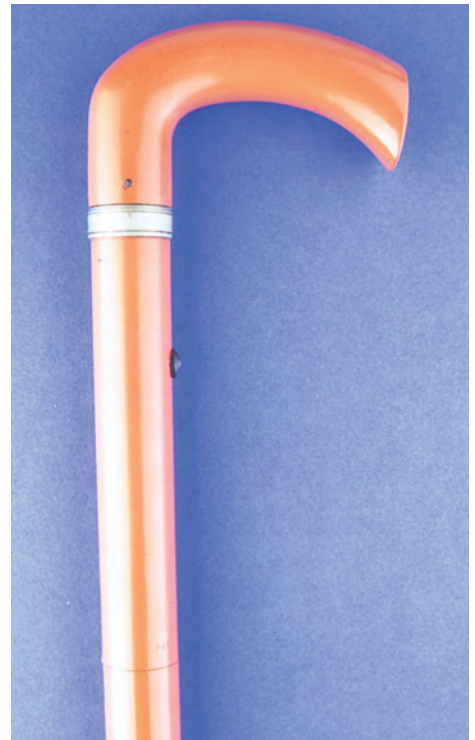


Figure 20. Rare coral colored Remington rifle cane.

The curing time for the epoxy depends on the temperature. The resin should be no less than 60 degrees. The curing time at that temperature will take several hours. At 150 degrees you can expect a curing time of one hour or less. After the epoxy has cured, you will need to sand with a very fine paper (400 grit or finer). Be very careful not to over sand and be especially careful of the surrounding areas.

Consideration should be used before you decide to proceed with any repairs on these canes. If your cane is not badly damaged, I strongly suggest that you leave it alone as opposed to potentially making it worse.

#### SUMMARY

Any cane gun is a very unique and collectable oddity. The fact that relatively few are encountered gives testimony to their rarity. Of the cane guns that were manufac-



Figure 21. Very rare Remington .22 rf dog's head "take down" rifle cane.

tured in America, the Remington rifle cane is considered by collectors to be the most desirable. Previously it was estimated that only about 1,000 of these rifle canes were manufactured from 1858-1888. I believe that the number actually produced is closer to 4,500. I base this assumption on the various serial numbers on different models that I have observed over the past three decades. The highest serial number that I have in my collection is 1597 and is found on a .22 rim fire cane. I have observed other .22s in the 1600 serial number range. I believe that each model of these canes were numbered independently of each other with a chronological progression beginning with the .31 percussion being followed by the .32 rim fire and then the .22 rim fire models. Each model would start its own serial number range with number 1. I am also aware of a .32 rim fire cane whose number is in the 1700 range.

Based on these observations, the following is my estimate of the number of each Remington rifle cane model manufactured.

- .31 percussion and conversion— Approx. 500
- .32 rim fire— Approx. 2,000
- .22 rim fire— Approx. 2,000

If my assumptions are anywhere near correct, the increased number of Remington rifle canes that were manufactured (a total of 4,500 over a 30 year period) still does not detract from the rarity and value of these guns. Many have been destroyed or ruined by natural disasters and carelessness of their owners.



Figure 22. Gutta purcha walking stick with a Remington dog's head handle.

It was only a few years ago that the Bureau of Tobacco, Alcohol and Firearms (BTAF) finally allowed collectors to legally own these guns without first purchasing a tax stamp. I am sure that because of these prior restrictions many of these guns were destroyed by various law enforcement agencies in accordance with the law when they were discovered or confiscated. At the present time, the Remington rifle cane is exempt from any special federal tax stamp or license. It is considered an oddity (as well as an antique) and is perfectly legal to have in your collection.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincerest thank you to Jerry Swinny, Vern Eckland, Jay Huber, David Fink, and especially to the late Paul Berg whose information and help have not only proven to be accurate but extremely valuable.

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