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## **Crystal Structure of Recoverin with Calcium Ions Bound to Both Functional EF-Hands**

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#### **Abstract**

Recoverin (Rv), a small  $Ca^{2+}$ -binding protein that inhibits rhodopsin kinase (RK), has four EF hands, two of which are functional (EF2 and EF3). Activation requires  $Ca^{2+}$  in both EF hands, but crystal structures have never been observed with  $Ca^{2+}$  ions in both sites; all previous structures have  $Ca^{2+}$  bound only to EF3. We suspected that this was due to an intermolecular crystal contact between T80 and a surface glutamate (E153) that precluded coordination of a  $Ca^{2+}$  ion in EF2. We constructed the E153A mutant, determined its X-ray crystal structure to 1.2 Å resolution, and show that  $2 Ca^{2+}$  ions are bound, one in EF3 and one in EF2. Additionally, several other residues are shown to adopt conformations in the  $2Ca^{2+}$ -structure not seen previously and not seen in a second structure of the E153A mutant containing  $Na^+$  instead of  $Ca^{2+}$  in the EF2 site. The sidechain rearrangements in these residues form a 28  $\AA$  long allosteric cascade along the surface of the protein connecting the  $Ca^{2+}$ -binding site of EF2 with the active-site pocket responsible for binding RK.

> Recoverin (Rv) is a small (23kDa) calcium ( $Ca^{2+}$ ) binding protein of the neuronal calcium sensor (NCS) family <sup>1, 2</sup> found in rod photoreceptor cells of vertebrate retina. Under *in vitro* conditions, when  $Ca^{2+}$  concentration is high, Rv inhibits rhodopsin kinase (RK) to prolong activation of the visual pigment rhodopsin  $3-5$ . Rv binds to the N-terminal helix of RK  $6, 7$ , an amphipathic helix also recognized by rhodopsin  $8$ . This interaction prolongs activation by inhibiting the ability of RK to phosphorylate rhodopsin.

The first crystal structure of Rv, determined over 20 years ago, revealed a compact arrangement of four EF hands, only one of which (EF3) had a bound  $Ca^{2+}$  ion  $9. EF3$ exhibits the canonical pentagonal bipyramidal geometry for binding a  $Ca^{2+}$  ion. The seven atoms coordinating the  $Ca^{2+}$  ion come from an axial water molecule (oxygen with spatial position −X) and five residues in the EF hand loop. The coordinating atoms include one oxygen atom each from Asp110 (X), Asp112 (Y), Asn114 (Z), and Thr116 (main chain carbonyl oxygen; −Y), and two oxygen atoms from Glu121 (−Z). The observation of only one  $Ca^{2+}$  ion bound in the crystal structure is perplexing because Rv in solution is well

**SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

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 $2$ The atomic coordinates and structure factors (codes 4YI8 and 4YI9) have been deposited in the Protein Data Bank.

 $Ca<sup>2+</sup>$  titration in the presence of 1.5 M NaCl

known to bind two Ca<sup>2+</sup> ions, one in EF2 and one in EF3 <sup>10, 11</sup>, and coordination of Ca<sup>2+</sup> at both EF2 and EF3 sites is required for binding RK  $^{12, 13}$ .

In the intervening years since the first structure, Rv has never been crystallized with  $Ca^{2+}$ bound to both sites. All of the crystal structures exhibit a nearly identical protein conformation containing one  $Ca^{2+}$  ion bound to EF3 with the same heptacoordinate geometry  $13-15$ . Interestingly, the Ca<sup>2+</sup>-free conformation of the EF2 loop is in an open conformation in all Rv structures except a mutant ( $191-202$ ) with a truncated C-terminal tail 15, where the loop is found to be in a partially closed conformation.

We searched existing Rv structures for crystal contacts that might cause interference with the EF2 loop and identified an intermolecular contact (i.e., hydrogen bond) between T80 (−Y) in the EF2 loop and E153 in the entering helix of the non-functional EF4 (Fig. 1). The hydrogen bond appears to prevent rotation of the D78 (Z) sidechain suggesting that the T80- E153 interaction may prevent  $Ca^{2+}$  coordination in EF2. To explore how this interaction might modify binding of  $Ca^{2+}$  to the protein in crystals, we created, characterized, and crystallized the E153A Rv mutant, leaving residues of EF2 unaltered.

We show here that the E153A mutation has minimal effect on the ability of Rv to bind  $Ca^{2+}$ and RK. However, the crystal structure of the E153A mutant, determined at 1.2 Å resolution, contains several differences with respect to the wild-type (WT) protein, most notably, two bound  $Ca^{2+}$  ions, one each in EF2 and EF3, both with canonical pentagonal bipyramidal geometry expected for heptacoordinated  $Ca^{2+}$  in EF hands. Several other amino acid residues stretching from EF2 to the N-terminus of the protein adopt conformations not observed in previous crystal structures of Rv.

We also determined the structure of E153A Rv containing a hexacoordinated  $Na<sup>+</sup>$  ion in EF2 and a heptacoordinated  $Ca^{2+}$  in EF3. This Na<sup>+</sup>-bound structure is of interest because EF2 assumes an octahedral geometry with four of the five loop residues and has an equatorial water molecule at the  $-Z$  position, bridging the ion with the  $12<sup>th</sup>$  residue (E85) of the EF hand loop. Interestingly, the other amino acids observed to change conformation in the  $2Ca^{2+}$ -structure do not change conformation with Na<sup>+</sup> bound to EF2.

### **EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES**

#### **Proteins**

All proteins were expressed in and purified from T7 Express *Escherichia coli* (New England Biolabs) as described previously  $14$ . WT and mutant Rv proteins were prepared in the nonmyristoylated form. The E153A Rv mutant was made using strand overlap extension PCR (Stratagene). RGS, the truncated RK mutant in which the catalytic domain is replaced with a GSGS linker joining residues 1-181 to 512-557 has been described 14. RGS contains a Cterminal  $His<sub>6</sub>$  tag used for purification of the protein and for immobilization on a Ni-NTA matrix in the Rv/RK binding assays <sup>14</sup>.

#### **Ca2+-binding assays**

 $Ca<sup>2+</sup>$ -binding assays were performed in triplicate according to previously established methods 11, 14 using a Hitachi F-2500 fluorescence spectrometer (Tokyo, Japan) to monitor  $Ca<sup>2+</sup>$ -induced changes in intrinsic tryptophan fluorescence. Titration data were fit to a model for two independent sites

$$
f\left(Ca^{2+}\right) = 0.5\left(\frac{\left[Ca^{2+}\right]}{\left[Ca^{2+}\right] + K_1} + \frac{\left[Ca^{2+}\right]}{\left[Ca^{2+}\right] + K_2}\right) \tag{1}
$$

where  $[Ca^{2+}]$  is the free  $Ca^{2+}$  concentration,  $f(Ca^{2+})$  is the fraction of total sites occupied by  $Ca^{2+}$ , and  $K_1$  and  $K_2$  are the first and second dissociation constants, respectively.

#### **RK-binding assays**

The ability of Rv to bind RK was determined using RGS in a "pull-down assay" on a Ni-NTA column <sup>14</sup>. A more quantitative ITC assay was employed to determine the  $K_D$  for the Rv-RGS interaction using a nanoITC microcalorimeter (TA Instruments). WT or E153A Rv was first dialyzed 1:1000 against two changes of buffer (10 mM Tris (pH 7), 100 mM KCl, 10 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub>) at 4 °C. Rv was loaded into the sample syringe (320-325 μM) and titrated into the RGS sample (29 μM) as 2 μL aliquots at 10 °C. Titration data were corrected for the heats of injection and dilution.

#### **Rv crystallization, X-ray data collection, and data analysis**

E153A Rv was crystallized in the presence of 20 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub> as described before <sup>14</sup>, except that crystallization conditions, defined by the number and type of ions bound, were:  $2Ca^{2+}$ , 2.5 M ammonium sulfate (pH 6.5); and  $1\text{Na}^+/1\text{Ca}^{2+}$ , 1.3 M sodium citrate (pH 6.6). Crystals were soaked in reservoir solution containing 10% glycerol as a cryoprotectant before flash freezing with liquid nitrogen. Diffraction data were collected at the Advance Light Source (Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Berkeley, CA). Data processing and refinement were performed as described previously <sup>14</sup>. WT Rv structure (PDB ID: 4MLW) was used as a search model for both structures described in this paper. Both data sets were refined anisotropically in the final refinement step using phenix.refine 16 from the PHENIX software suite v1.9 <sup>17</sup>. In the  $2Ca^{2+}$  data set, hydrogens were generated in riding positions for protein atoms alone during final refinement. The data collection and final refinement statistics are given in Table 1. The coordinates and structure factors for the  $2Ca^{2+}$  (PDB ID code 4YI8) and  $1Na^{+}/1Ca^{2+}$  (PDB ID code 4YI9) data sets have been submitted to the Protein Data Bank. All the crystal structure figures in this paper were prepared using PyMol v1.3 (Schrödinger LLC, Portland, OR).

### **RESULTS**

#### **Characterization of the E153A Rv mutant**

Given that Rv is a monomer in solution, and E153 is located on the surface of the protein well away from any of the active sites (Fig. 1), we did not expect RK- or  $Ca^{2+}$ -binding functions to be significantly impacted in the E153A crystal contact mutant. Nonetheless, it

was important to make this determination experimentally.  $Ca^{2+}$ -binding measurements were performed by monitoring the changes in intrinsic tryptophan fluorescence as a function of increasing  $Ca^{2+}$  concentration  $11, 14, 18$ . Titration data for WT Rv were fit well by equation 1, which models the binding of  $Ca^{2+}$  as two independent, non-cooperative events. Dissociation constants of  $0.08 \pm 0.01$  μM and  $7.8 \pm 1.2$  μM were determined for the high (EF3) and low (EF2) affinity sites, respectively (Fig. 2A) and are consistent with values reported in the literature 11, 15. Dissociation constants determined for the high and low affinity sites of E153A Rv were  $0.12 \pm 0.01$   $\mu$ M and  $13 \pm 1.7$   $\mu$ M, respectively (Fig. 2B), demonstrating that the E153A mutation does not significantly affect  $Ca^{2+}$ -binding properties of the protein.

We next tested the ability of E153A Rv to bind RK, as monitored through the interaction with the RK RGS domain, which contains the N-terminal helix of RK that is targeted by Rv  $6, 7$ . This interaction was monitored both qualitatively with a pull-down assay (Fig. 2C) and quantitatively by ITC (Fig. 2, D and E). Both assays (Fig. 2, C and E) show that E153A Rv and RGS form a stable complex with 1:1 stoichiometry and a  $K_D$  of 1.0  $\mu$ M, similar to that of WT Rv and RGS (1:1 stoichiometry,  $K_D = 1.3 \mu M$ ; Fig. 2, C and D), demonstrating that the mutation has minimal effect on the binding of RK.

#### **Crystal structure of E153A Rv with two bound Ca2+ ions**

The E153A mutant crystallized in 2.5 M ammonium sulfate, and the crystal diffracted to 1.2 Å resolution. The refined electron density map clearly revealed that the EF2 loop was in the predicted closed conformation and coordinated an ion with heptacoordinate pentagonal bipyramidal geometry. The EF2 ion presented as a clear spherical  $F_o$  -  $F_c$  peak (35  $\sigma$ ) and was coordinated by an axial water molecule (−X) and five residues: D74 (X), N76 (Y), D78 (Z), T80 (main chain carbonyl oxygen; −Y), and E85 (−Z). Moreover, the EF2 density is similar to the density observed for a  $Ca^{2+}$  ion in EF3 (Fig. 3). The anomalous difference Fourier map, recorded with X-rays of 1.9 Å wavelength (data not submitted), for the  $Ca^{2+}$  in both EF2 and EF3 was observed up to 20 σ. As guided by the electron density, the EF2 loop was built in a closed conformation using Coot v0.7<sup>19</sup> and a  $Ca^{2+}$  ion was included in both EF hands for further refinement. The final average B-factor for EF2 (all atoms; 14.4  $\AA^2$ ) and EF3 (all atoms; 13.3  $\AA^2$ ) indicated that both EF hands were highly stable. The axial water molecule coordinating  $Ca^{2+}$  in EF3 was observed in alternate positions, exhibiting an occupancy of 80% for the position shown in the figure.

Comparison of the E153A crystal structure with that of WT Rv (PDB ID: 4MLW) shows clear conformational changes for several residues (Fig. 4A). The fact that  $Ca^{2+}$  is bound to EF3 in both structures implies that all differences likely result from the binding of  $Ca^{2+}$  to EF2. Closing of the EF2 loop results in a  $\sim$ 3.7 Å inward shift of F73 that disrupts a hydrogen bond between the N $\varepsilon$ 1 of W104 and the O<sub>Y</sub> atom of S72 (Fig. 4B). The bulky side chain of W104 is flipped ~100° towards M92 to reduce the steric hindrance from the shifted F73. M92 then undergoes a conformational change that makes room for the H91 side chain and a water molecule that stabilizes H91 by bridging it and the carbonyl oxygen of I88. The new conformation of H91 allows F23 to move 3.8 Å inward and, as a result of the shift,

allows rearrangement of the N-terminal region (residues 7-25) with a 20 $^{\circ}$  tilt and 4.2 Å outward shift of the N-terminal helix (residues 11-19).

Reorientation of W104 provides a structural explanation for at least part of the observed fluorescence increase in the solution  $Ca^{2+}$ -titrations described above for the low-affinity site (K<sub>2</sub> ~8 μM), which has been assigned as EF2 through mutagenesis studies <sup>10, 12</sup> (Fig. 2, A and B).

#### **Crystal structure of E153A Rv with one Na+ and one Ca2+ bound**

Crystals of E153A Rv were also grown in 1.3 M sodium citrate and diffracted to a resolution of 1.35 Å. The initial refinement revealed that the EF2 loop was in a partially closed conformation, but with three clear spherical  $F_o$  -  $F_c$  peaks (9  $\sigma$  and two 5  $\sigma$  values) at the center of EF2. We modeled these densities as a  $Na<sup>+</sup>$  ion and two water molecules, respectively. Assignment of the 9  $\sigma$  density as Na<sup>+</sup> is supported by the following: First, the ion is coordinated with only four of the five residues of a typical EF hand:  $D74$  (X), N76 (Y), D78 (Z), and T80 (main chain carbonyl oxygen; −Y) (Fig. 5A). One water molecule occupies the typical axial position (−X), but the second water was equatorial in the –Z position and bridged the  $Na<sup>+</sup>$  ion with E85. The bidentate carboxylate of E85 is required to complete coordination of a  $Ca^{2+}$  ion with a pentagonal bipyramidal geometry in the  $-Z$ position (Fig. 5A). This equatorial water provides only a single coordination that results in an octahedral geometry for the ion. Distances between the ion and loop residues are typical of metal ions bound within an EF hand (2.2-2.5 Å). Second, the *Fo* - *F<sup>c</sup>* peak of the EF2 ion (9 σ) is significantly weaker than that of the Ca<sup>2+</sup> ion coordinated in EF3 (18 σ). The anomalous difference Fourier map, recorded with X-rays of 1.9 Å wavelength (data not submitted), for the EF2 ion is also very weak compared to that of EF3 and even weaker than the sulphur atoms of residues C39, M92 and M132. Third, the final average B-factor for EF2 (all atoms; 25.0  $\AA^2$ ) is higher than the Ca<sup>2+</sup>-bound EF3 (all atoms; 20.8  $\AA^2$ ), which indicates that EF2 assumes a less stable conformation than EF3. Fourth, refinement of the 9 σ density with either a  $Ca^{2+}$  ion or water molecule resulted in a higher or lower B-factor, respectively, than the coordinating residues. Fifth, with the exception of a  $\sim$  2.7 Å inward shift of F73, none of the other residues observed to undergo conformational changes in the  $2Ca^{2+}$ structure were observed to undergo changes in this structure. That is to say the W104-S72 hydrogen bond is intact (see above) and the bound EF2 ion is incapable of disrupting this bond because of the hexacoordinate geometry. Finally, the crystal was grown in 1.3 M sodium citrate. Titration of Rv with  $Ca^{2+}$  in the presence of 1.5 M sodium chloride shows the protein to have significantly decreased affinity for Ca<sup>2+</sup> (K<sub>1</sub> = 19 ± 2.7 µM and K<sub>2</sub> = 500  $\pm$  66 μM; Figure S1). The effect could even be exacerbated by citrate in the crystallization solution as a result of chelating free  $Ca^{2+}$ .

### **DISCUSSION**

In over twenty years of study, Rv has heretofore never been crystallized with  $Ca^{2+}$  ions bound to both functional EF hands in the protein, and, in particular,  $Ca^{2+}$  was never observed coordinated to EF2 in the N-terminal domain of the protein. In an attempt to understand this, we screened published structures of the protein for the presence of crystal

contacts that might preclude coordination of a  $Ca^{2+}$  ion to EF2. With only one exception (*vide infra*), we found that each published structure contained an intermolecular crystal contact involving T80 of the EF2 loop. In each case, the contact involved hydrogen bonds from the main chain N-H and side chain –OH of a T80 donor from one Rv molecule and a carboxylate oxygen of an E153 acceptor from a second Rv molecule in the unit cell. E153 is distant from any of the known active site regions of the protein and, for this reason, was chosen as the site of mutation to see if coordination of  $Ca^{2+}$  in the EF2 loop of the altered protein was now permitted in the crystal. As anticipated, the E153A Rv mutant displayed near WT affinity for both  $Ca^{2+}$  ions and RK when assayed in solution (Fig. 2). In contrast, the crystal properties of the mutant protein were significantly different from the WT. Crystals of E153A were generally more numerous, larger (roughly  $0.1 \times 0.36 \times 0.4$  mm *versus*  $0.08 \times 0.1 \times 0.2$  mm), and diffracted to higher resolution (1.2 Å *versus* 1.45 Å) than those of WT Rv. Most significantly, the E153A mutant crystalized with two  $Ca^{2+}$  ions bound to the protein, one each in EF hands 2 and 3, and both EF hands conform to the canonical heptacoordinate pentagonal bipyramidal geometry expected for an EF hand when  $Ca^{2+}$  is bound (Fig. 3).

With one exception, all previous crystal structures of Rv contain the E153-T80 crystal contact that disrupts the binding of  $Ca^{2+}$  in EF2 (Table 2). The only exception, that of the Cterminally truncated ( $191-202$ ) mutant of Rv, exhibits no interaction between T80 and E153 in the crystal, possibly due to a different space group  $(P2<sub>1</sub>)$  than other Rv proteins  $(I<sub>4</sub>)$ , and therefore, we would expect this crystal to bind  $Ca^{2+}$  at both sites in the protein. However, while the EF2 loop is partially closed in the  $191-202$  mutant, it is empty <sup>15</sup>. Notably, the 191-202 mutant was crystallized from 2.4 M sodium malate, and we suspect that malate chelates  $Ca^{2+}$  under these conditions much as we suggest citrate does with our E153A mutant crystallized from 1.3 M sodium citrate.

Inspection of the NMR structure (PDB ID: 2I94) of Rv with a bound peptide composed of the N-terminal residues of RK provides insight into the biological relevance of changes observed in the  $2Ca^{2+}E153A$  crystal structure (Fig. 6). Several residues within our  $2Ca^{2+}$ E153A Rv structure adopt a different conformation than has been seen in any other crystal structure of Rv (Fig. 4), forming a cascade of side-chain rearrangements beginning with the disruption of a hydrogen bond between S72 and W104 caused by an inward movement (3.7 Å) of F73 upon the binding of Ca<sup>2+</sup> to EF2 and ending 28 Å away along the surface of the protein, with movement of F23 away from a Trp residue, W31, that is in the active site responsible for binding RK. W31 itself does not move in the new structure, most likely because it is involved in a tight interaction with I173 of a neighboring Rv molecule in the same unit cell. The interaction between W31 of Rv and F15 of RK is of particular interest because these residues are in *van der Waals* contact in all of the NMR structures. In addition, mutation of F15 (to A) in the RK peptide is known to disrupt the interaction with  $Rv^{6, 7}$ , indicating that F15 is critical for this interaction. Clearly the side-chain rearrangements observed with the E153A mutant highlight an allosteric path connecting the  $Ca^{2+}$ -binding site of EF2 to the RK-binding pocket. In this context, we note that the sidechain rearrangements observed in the  $2Ca^{2+}$  E153A Rv structure do not occur in the  $1Na^{+}/1Ca^{2+}E153A$  structure, increasing confidence that the conformational transition is

involved in enabling the binding of RK. In addition, it emphasizes the requirement for  $Ca^{2+}$ in EF2 to provide a trigger for the inward movement of F73 and subsequent side-chain rearrangements of amino acids involved in the allosteric conformational change. In this regard, the  $1Na^{+}/1Ca^{2+}$  crystal structure is reminiscent of the calmodulin CaM41/75 mutant that in disulfide trapped form binds  $Ca^{2+}$  with hexacoordinate octahedral geometry in site 1 and cannot undergo the change to an active conformation  $20, 21$ .

#### **Supplementary Material**

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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### **ABBREVIATIONS**



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#### **FIGURE 1.**

(A) Intermolecular crystal contact between Rv molecules. The N-terminus (NT), C-terminus (CT), and  $Ca^{2+}$  ion coordinated in EF3 (green sphere) are shown for each molecule of Rv (PDB ID: 4MLW). (B) Close up of the intermolecular hydrogen bond between E153 and T80 of WT Rv. The *2F0*-*FC* electron density map is shown at a 2 σ cut off for residues E153 and T80.

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#### **FIGURE 2.**

 $Ca<sup>2+</sup>$  and RGS binding assays for WT and E153A Rv. (A) Normalized change in fluorescence for  $Ca^{2+}$  binding to WT Rv. Equation 1 was used to fit the titration data. (B) Normalized change in fluorescence for  $Ca^{2+}$  binding to E153A Rv. Equation 1 was used to fit the titration data, and the *dashed line* is the titration curve for WT Rv from Fig. 2A. (C) Pull-down assay in which RGS was first immobilized on Ni-NTA matrix before Rv was added in the presence of 1 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub>. After binding, each sample was washed with  $25$ column volumes of buffer and the Rv-RGS complex was eluted with 250 mM imidazole. Lanes are defined as L, load; FT, flow-through; W, last wash; and E, elution. (D) ITC isotherm showing the heat measured when WT Rv  $(325 \mu M)$  was titrated into a solution of RGS (29 μM) at 10°C. (E) ITC isotherm showing the heat measured when E153A Rv (320 μM) was titrated into a solution of RGS (29 μM) at  $10^{\circ}$ C.



#### **FIGURE 3.**

Structures showing the coordination of a  $Ca^{2+}$  ion in EF2 and EF3. The  $F_0$  -  $F_C$  omit map is shown for both  $Ca^{2+}$  ions at a 5  $\sigma$  cut off.

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### **FIGURE 4.**

Superimposed structures of WT (*cyan*; PDB ID: 4MLW) and E153A (*yellow*; PDB ID: 4YI8) Rv. (A) Residues altered by the binding of  $Ca^{2+}$  (*green spheres*) in EF2 are shown as sticks. The N-terminal tail (residues 7-20) has been removed to aid visualization of the highlighted residues. (B) Close up image showing how  $Ca^{2+}$ -binding in EF2 shifts F73 to disrupt the S72-W104 hydrogen bond that initiates the rearrangement shown in Fig. 4A.

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#### **FIGURE 5.**

(A) Structure showing the coordination of a  $Na<sup>+</sup>$  ion in EF2 of E153A Rv. (B) Superposition of EF2 of E153A Rv that coordinates either a  $Ca^{2+}$  ion (yellow colored backbone with light green sphere) or a Na<sup>+</sup> ion (green colored backbone with purple sphere).



#### **FIGURE 6.**

NMR Models (PDB ID: 2I94) of the N-terminal 15 residues of RK (magenta) binding to Rv (yellow). Schematic showing the arrangement of F23 and W31 of Rv with F15 of RK.

#### **Table 1**

#### Data collection and refinement statistics



a<br>
Highest resolution cell values are given parenthesis.

#### **Table 2**

Summary of available Rv crystal structures listed in the Protein Data Bank

