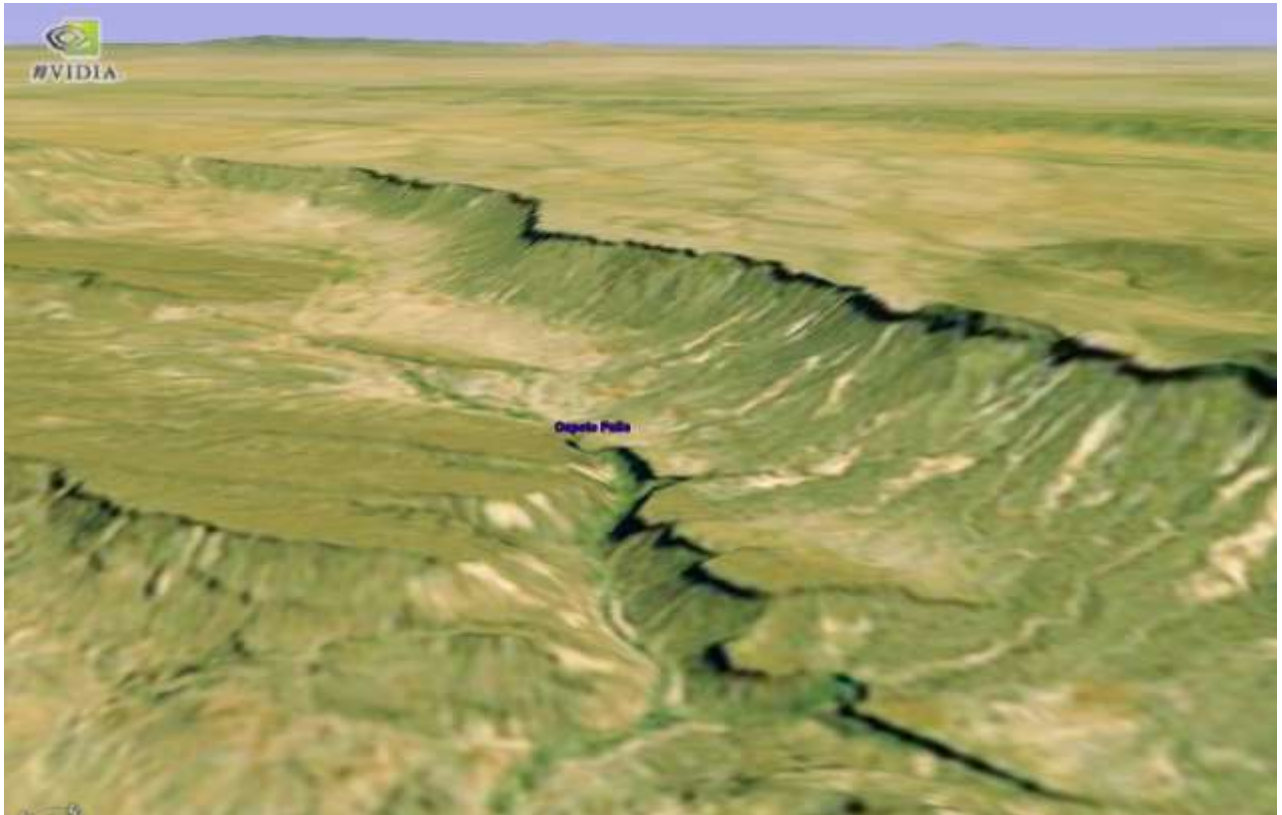


## BACK TO REATA

In the corner of my mind there is a place of much fascination and mystery. It's located in far West Texas where few have visited but the mystique and geology of the area continues to draw me back and back again to revisit the early history of my family there. It is located in an area bounded by the small Texas towns of Marfa, Valentine, Van Horn, and the Rio Grande River to the west. This is big sky country where from several vistas one can see for miles and miles with nary a soul in sight. There are magical mountains, springs and mysterious canyons to be seen there that have not changed throughout time.



AERIAL OF THE RIMROCK AND LOCATION OF CAPOTE FALLS FROM GOOGLE EARTH

I suppose the world first got a taste of that region from a 1950's movie entitled "Giant" which gave one the impression that it was a dusty flat wilderness. George Stevens wanted to show a satirical side of Texas in that film so he chose the most lonely prairie site he could find to build the big Reata Ranch House façade. (There had been an earlier movie filmed in the area called "High Lonesome" with John Barrymore Jr., but it was not widely seen by many and is not available on video.)



Long before my fascination of the area was cultivated, I had only briefly traveled through this part of West Texas in my youth. While taking a University of Texas Geology field trip in the area our scruffy group of students rolled into Marfa while the epic picture Giant was being made. We had arrived in a conventional old yeller school bus with the word “Hell” pasted into the front destination window and a rattlesnake adorned slop jar attached to the front of the hood. Greeting us was a large banner hanging over Marfa’s main street proclaiming, “Marfa is Proud of George Stevens Giant” (After the movie was shown, however, the banner was not seen again). Our grossly adorned geology bus found no space to park in front of the old El Paisano Hotel so an unnamed devilish group of students “rescued” the large Texas shaped sign in front on which was written (“No Parking, Reserved for Giant Prods.) which was then later held hostage within the confines of old yeller. It was noted that here was no room on the sign for the whole word “Producers”. Photos of this parking sign and the bus with the criminals perched alongside were prominently published in the UT Geology newsletter several years later.



**Paisano Hotel Front**

**Not unlike the movie, however, sprawling ranches cover this part of the country. My grandfather was a Texas Ranger that often patrolled the area, and described in his Texas Rangers Diary and Scrapbook about his visits to the various ranches to protect the local inhabitants from rampaging Mexican bandits. He described several of the raids and some of the brutalities that were caused by these outlaws in this region before the turn of the century. In that early time my grandmother's sister had married Mr. L.C. Brite, and his his son, Lucas had established a huge ranching spread near the Worth Evans movie location at the base of Capote Mountain and also built a large two-story home in Marfa. The Brites were a powerful family in the area not unlike the Bick Benedict of "Giant" fame and the family history is told in a published book entitled "The Brites of Capote".**



**Brite Home in Marfa**

**Of particular geological interest on this ranch property is the beautiful remote "Capote Falls" which is the highest waterfall in Texas flowing from an underground spring. The spectacular "Rim rock" which thrusts its cliffs upward toward Mexico also offers giant vistas from its crest. There are several photos of old Model T Fords perched precariously on the very edge of this cliff to show the size of the escarpment**

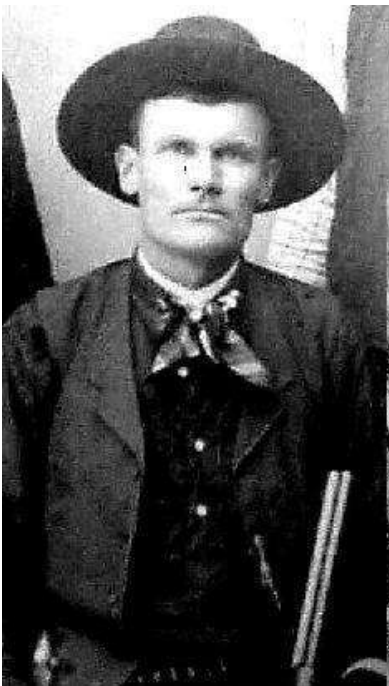


**Capote Falls**



**Family Members at “The Rim”**

**After my grandfather left the Ranger force, he managed a ranch at Chispa, which is now a part of the Brite family spread. In the original Ranger diary, written in Spenserian Handscript, there were also a number of very old faded photos of him exploring the streams and canyons of the area and of him on horseback at the ranch. He had later married my grandmother in El Paso but continued to live in the Marfa area and my mother was born in the Brite home there. Retiring from ranching, he purchased a general store and lumber yard in Sierra Blanca and raised his family there for a time prior to his death.**



**Alonzo "Lon" Van Oden  
Texas Ranger**



**There was an early attempt to drill for oil on the Bright Ranch and some shows were reported but the region is not geologically acceptable for oil exploration at this time. If any other drilling occurs and if oil is found, it is sure to rekindle thought of James Dean's Jet Rink strike from the old classic film made in the valley there. There have been a number of geologists from various universities doing thesis field work in the past near the Van Horn, Valentine and Sierra Blanca areas.**



**Jack Richards Installing the Texas Ranger Cross in Marfa**

**Marfa has been famous for its mysterious lights, which have been seen by many but are still unexplained. A few old posts and beams that supported the movie set of Reata can still be seen from the Valentine Marfa highway and Valentine remains famous for the annual rites of postmarking thousands of valentines sent there from all over the world to be mailed. My grandparents are buried in the Marfa cemetery and my brother placed an Iron Ranger Cross next to the Oden family tombstone a few years ago.**



### **Ruins of Reata**

**This remote part of Texas remains a fascination for me as I carefully scrutinize the ancient pictures taken there and I peruse the aerial maps looking for places seen in those old faded photographs that I long to visit. I cannot let go of the lure to this strange land that continues to occupy my curiosity. The ghosts of events that took place there that is so much of my family's past still haunts me in a strange way to this very day. Life there in those earlier years was truly an example of the real old west. My imagination is of stories there that could have been told, but appear to be lost forever.**

**Jim Richards**

**March 2005**