

Exploring the Route to Castle Dracula. A Reply to Paul Murray and Brian Coffey¹

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In December 2023, an article by Stoker biographer Paul Murray challenged my findings about the location of the fictitious Castle Dracula, known from Bram Stoker's vampire novel. In fact, Dracula contains sufficient clues to narrow down the area where the castle could be situated: the ridge of the Călimani volcanic caldera. Stoker's preparatory notes even allow us to pin down the exact site: Mount Izvorul Călimanului. The Millerian paradigm that Stoker was "sloppy" in his research arguably does not apply to the locale of the castle; instead, it is Murray who is less precise than Stoker, and echoes errors I refuted in 2012 already.

Keywords: *Stoker, Dracula, castle, fictitious locations, Romania, Bistriţa, Paul Murray*

1. Introduction

Volume 3 of the *Journal of Vampire Studies* (2023) contained an article by Paul Murray, "A Tour of Dracula's Transylvania," that, among others, discussed my theory on the location of the (fictional) Castle Dracula and my insights about the conspicuous vagueness of *Dracula's* route descriptions. I will confine my remarks to the elements of this article that address my research.

As both Murray's article and my own text are hard to understand without consulting visual references, I have posted several annotated maps and illustrations on my website www.vampvault.jimdofree.com/murray, in addition to the images included in this essay.

I truly appreciate that a Stoker expert such as Paul Murray, supported by his friend and travel companion Brian Coffey, took the time to critically examine my findings and share their thoughts. Their critique deserves a detailed analysis and counter-argument,

¹ The article "A Tour of Dracula's Transylvania" by Stoker biographer Paul Murray, to which the present article is a reply, was published in *Journal of Vampire Studies* 3 (2023): 7-30, available online at https://archive.org/details/journal_of_vampire_studies_3_2023.

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however, lest we want Dracula Studies to fall back to the paradigm outlined by Elizabeth Miller and Clive Leatherdale more than two decades ago.³

I first published my arguments on why Mount Izvorul Călimanului was the most likely site Bram Stoker had chosen for Castle Dracula in spring 2012, in Linköping Electronic Articles in Computer and Information Science (De Roos 2012a) and in “The Dracula Maps” (De Roos 2012b), as part of my book *The Ultimate Dracula*. Prof. William Hughes of Bath Spa University, then President of the Gothic Association and the editor-in-chief of its journal, *Gothic Studies*, suggested a review of *The Ultimate Dracula* by Catherine Wynn. Alas, this plan never came to fruition.

Bram’s great-grand-nephew, Dacre Stoker, however, was quick to pick up my new insights; in November 2013, we travelled to Romania together and presented our ideas for a Dracula travel guide to the Romanian press, sparking an extensive article about the Izvorul connection by Shaun Turton in *Slate Magazine*, among others (Turton 2014).

In 2015, I also presented my findings at the International Conference Beliefs in Education and Culture in Timișoara organised by my friend, Prof. Marius-Mircea Crișan of West University Timișoara. In the wake of this meeting, my contribution about the location of the castle and the identity of the Count was included in Crișan’s book *Dracula: An International Perspective* (De Roos 2017). In the magazine *Contemporanul Ideea Europeană*, Prof. Ștefan Borbély lauded my approach:

In this volume edited by Marius-Mircea Crișan, the most exciting text concerning the geographic background of Count Dracula is written by Hans Corneel de Roos, who locates the castle of the Count in the Călimani Mountains, with exceptional scholarly detail. [...] with mathematical perfection [he] traces the route taken by Jonathan Harker with the post coach from Bistrița to Prundul Bârgăului and Pasul Tihuța, where he meets with the Count, who takes him to his castle in the area of Bilbor. (Borbély 2018)

In the meantime, I exchanged several emails with Duncan Light, whose work is referenced in Murray’s article, and met him twice at international Dracula conferences: in Timișoara (2015) and at the Fourth World Dracula Congress in Dublin in 2016 I initiated. Duncan never concealed that he was sceptical about the idea that Stoker would have picked a specific site. We did not discuss the matter in detail, however. Murray’s article thus is the first to offer an elaborate critique.

³ Both scholars refuted McNally’s and Florescu’s idea that Stoker modelled his Count using detailed knowledge about the historical Vlad the Impaler. In reaction, they claimed that Stoker’s preparatory research was sketchy. For a more detailed discussion, see De Roos 2017.

2. Harker's route to the Castle

The first part of this critique deals with my calculations of time, speed and distance for Jonathan Harker's trip from Bistritz to the Castle. As Murray correctly notes, several parameters are not specified in Stoker's novel:

1. We don't know what part of the trip with the Count's calèche went uphill, what part downhill.
2. Between 9 p.m. and midnight, the calèche drives in circles, without leaving the Borgo Pass — we do not know for how long, and over what distance.
3. After midnight, the driver stops several times to inspect the blue flames — we do not know for how long altogether.

Murray and Coffey conclude:

Taken together, these three factors make any calculation of the time involved in Jonathan Harker's journey to Castle Dracula useless as an indicator of its location. [...] If Stoker had set out to frustrate de Roos-style calculations, he could not have done a better job. (Murray 2023, 19)

As explained in my 2012 and 2017 texts, I indeed believe that Stoker obfuscated essential details and thwarted such calculations on purpose, so that his story — presented as a bundle of purely factual notes — could not be disproven (De Roos 2012a, 23; De Roos 2012b, 66; De Roos 2017, 110). This does not mean, however, that we should stop looking at the remaining clues; there are still important insights to be won, as the text of the novel, Stoker's preparatory notes and geographical reality are all interconnected.

The maps teach us that the distance from Bistritz to the agreed meeting point, located at or near the eastern end of the Borgo Pass, must have been around 48-50 km.⁴ According to Stoker's notes (Document Rosenbach #27a; Eighteen-Bisang and Miller, 2008, 96-97), the coach would leave Bistritz at 2 p.m. and arrive at the meeting point in the Borgo Pass at 9 p.m., "an hour early". The Count's letter to Harker mentions 3 p.m. as time of departure, however.⁵ With six or seven hours travel time, the stagecoach had an average speed of 7 or 8 km/h. This seems to match the speed of 7.5 km/h indicated

⁴ "[...] and at last we saw before us the Pass opening out on the eastern side," Harker observes shortly before reaching this meeting point. *Dracula*, 40, Chapter 1, Jonathan Harker's Journal of 5 May. Wikipedia states that the "Tihuța Pass" extends to Căsoi, Suceava, but this does not match Stoker's understanding. **Note:** For all quotes from *Dracula*, the page numbers refer to Leatherdale 1998.

⁵ *Dracula*, 32, Chapter 1, Jonathan Harker's Journal of 3 May. Perhaps, leaving one hour early at Bistritz was part of the driver's plan to arrive an hour early at the meeting point? Page Rosenbach #36b (Eighteen-Bisang and Miller 2008, 84-85) mentions "to Borgo Pass about 7 or 8 hours—."

by the 1896 *Baedeker* for the stagecoach trip from Bistritz to Kimpolung, Suceava County (Câmpulung Moldovenesc): 79 miles or 127 km in 17 hours (Baedeker 1896, 397).⁶

Around 9 p.m., Harker switches to the Count's calèche, which circles around in the Borgo Pass till midnight. Although we know the duration, we do not know the distance covered before the driver leaves the main route, and thus, we do not know the speed. We do not need it, however, to make an educated guess about the next phase. The calèche leaves the Borgo Pass around midnight:

*I struck a match, and by its flame looked at my watch; it was within a few minutes of midnight. [...] Then, far off in the distance, from the mountains on each side of us began a louder and a sharper howling — that of wolves — [...] and the horses so far became quiet that the driver was able to descend and to stand before them. [...] The driver again took his seat, and shaking his reins, started off at a great pace. This time, after going to the far side of the Pass, he suddenly turned down a narrow roadway which ran sharply to the right.*⁷

As Harker came from Bistritz, the “far side of the Pass” means its north-east side; we may surmise that this “narrow roadway” led to the south-east. A remark by Van Helsing, who later follows the same road together with Mina, confirms that the route to the castle not only leads south, but also eastward:

*It is now not far off sunset time, and over the snow the light of the sun flow in big yellow flood, so that we throw great long shadow on where the mountain rise so steep. For we are going up, and up; and all is oh! so wild and rocky, as though it were the end of the world.*⁸

We now can roughly outline the area where the castle must be located: the Călimani Mountains between the Borgo Pass on the north and the River Mureș in the south.⁹ The

⁶ See also Klinger 2008, 33n81. De Roos 2012b, 26, used the travel speed suggested by Baedeker to estimate the distance the stagecoach could have travelled in 6 or 7 hours. But the route to Kimpolung must have included several stops. If these stops lasted e.g. 2 h, the actual speed was 127 km/15 h = 8½ km/h. The diligence from Bistritz to Naszód (397): 2¾ h for 14½ miles or 23.3 km, which also means a speed of 8½ km/h. The diligence from Schässburg to Fogaras (401): 44 km in 4¾ h; speed 9¼ km/h. From Karlsburg to Mühlbach (408): 15.3 km in 1¾ h; speed 8¾ km/h. Fogaras to Kronstadt (411): 8¼ km/h. The travel speed for a diligence or stagecoach in Transylvania thus was around 8½ km/h.

⁷ *Dracula*, 43-44, Chapter 1, Jonathan Harker's Journal of 5 May.

⁸ *Dracula*, 493, Chapter 27, Memorandum by Abraham Van Helsing, 4 November. Leatherdale 1998, 46n155, already came to the same conclusion.

⁹ Already Leatherdale 1998, 46n155, mentioned the Călimani Mountains. As De Roos 2012b, 50, explains, neither the Count's calèche nor Van Helsing and Mina's horse carriage is reported to have crossed the River Mureș. Because of the many villages along the river, the isolated castle should be

eastern border is the border of Transylvania: already in the third paragraph, Harker states that the Count is a Transylvanian nobleman.¹⁰ The western border is not clearly defined, but any location west of Piatra Fântânele can be safely excluded, given the direction of the calèche after leaving the Pass.

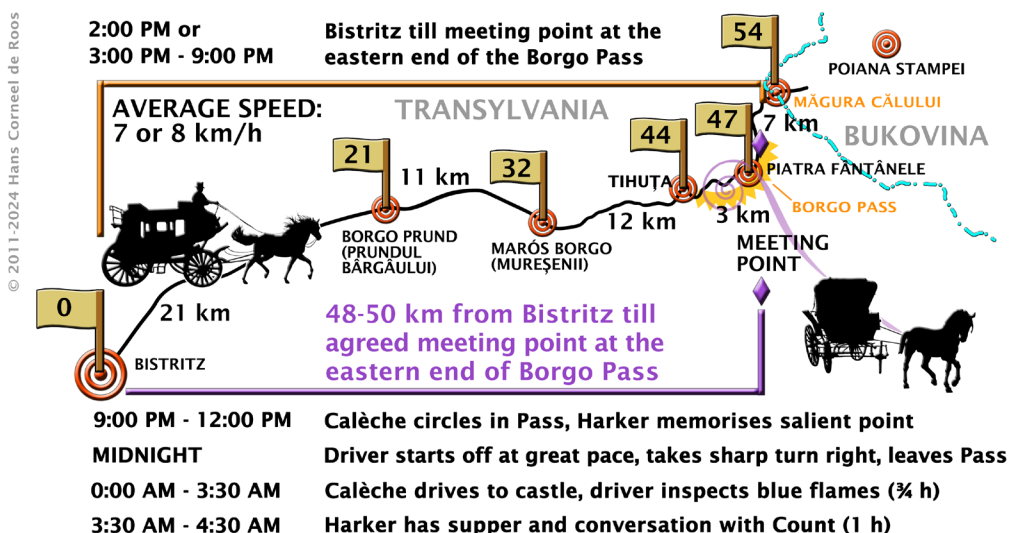


Figure 1. Diagram with distances and times relating to Harker's journey to the castle.

Let us assume that Harker, after arriving at the castle, needed about one hour to make a "hasty toilet" and enjoy his supper and cigar, until daybreak interrupted his conversation with his host. If we know the time of dawn, we can estimate the time of arrival at Castle Dracula and the duration of the trip from the Borgo Pass.

For May 5, 1893,¹¹ the solar calculator of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration indicates 4:57 a.m. for apparent sunrise in the Borgo Pass;¹² twilight occurred at 4:23 a.m. Harker's meeting may have ended around 4:30

well north of it. Would it be just north or even south of the Mureș, the Count better would have advised Harker to take the train to Reghin (Szász Régen); from there, the route to the castle would be shorter than from Bistriz.

¹⁰ The map shown by Walker and Wright 1997, 67, however, erroneously seems to place the castle in Moldavia, not Transylvania. See the maps on my website and De Roos 2012b, 51.

¹¹ Miller 2006, 86-88, picked 1893 as the year of the novel's action. Although I believe that Stoker tried to confuse us about the time frame, we can use May 5, 1893 to determine the time of sunrise, as for this site and this day of the month, sunrise time almost stays unchanged throughout the 1890s.

¹² See <https://gml.noaa.gov/grad/solcalc/>, consulted on February 1, 2024.

a.m.¹³ Accordingly, the calèche would have arrived at the castle around 3:30 a.m. If we deduct 45 minutes for the stops at the blue flames, the vehicle would have used $2\frac{3}{4}$ hours to move away from the Pass: $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours minus $\frac{3}{4}$ hour for inspecting the blue flames (see Figure 1).

For the speed during this second phase of the calèche trip, we must consider two competing factors:

1. The Count's calèche, with just a single passenger, was much lighter than the stage coach packed with travellers. Moreover, the calèche is said to be drawn by four "swift" horses, praised as "splendid animals," as opposed to the "little horses" drawing the stagecoach.
2. The route is said to be "in the main always ascending," and a "fine, powdery snow began to fall." Both factors would impact the speed negatively.

Murray writes:

As Brian pointed out, de Roos does not seem to have taken into account that the first part of the journey is mostly uphill and then the latter part mostly downhill,¹⁴ without knowing the percentage of each, rendering any calculation of average speed moot. (Murray 2023, 18-19)

¹³ In this case, the distance from the Borgo Pass to the castle can be neglected: in Toplița at the River Mureș, 44 km beeline distance south-south-east of the Pass, apparent sunrise also was at 4:57 a.m., and at Bilbor, 42 km south-east, one minute earlier. Due to atmospheric refraction, apparent sunrise occurs *before* actual sunrise. "[T]he first dim streak of the coming dawn" mentioned by Harker was visible still earlier: civil twilight preceded sunrise by 34 minutes. The meeting with the Count did not end instantly, however, and the mountains at the eastern horizon may have delayed the sight of dawn. The website <https://sunrisesunset.com>, consulted on November 20, 2011, indicated 5:32 a.m. for civil twilight in Klausenburg on May 5, 1901; my calculations from the years 2012 and 2017 were based on these data. When I checked the website again on February 1, 2024, the time had been changed to 4:32 a.m.; I assume that one hour initially added for Daylight Saving Time has been deducted again. The denser time frame is off-set by updated information about the speed of horsedrawn carriages.

¹⁴ In fact, Harker writes, "We kept on ascending, with occasional periods of quick descent, but in the main always ascending." — see *Dracula*, 46, Chapter 1, Harker's Journal of 5 May. The Castle. Perhaps, Murray refers to a remark in Mina Harker's Diary of 6 November: "6 November. — It was late in the afternoon when the Professor and I took our way towards the east whence I knew Jonathan was coming. We did not go fast, though the way was steeply downhill [...]." See *Dracula*, 503, Chapter 27. As Leatherdale, 1998, 504n102 already noted, "steeply downhill" hardly matches the calèche's effortless approach of the castle suggested in *Dracula's* first chapters. In my model, there is an option, however, that matches all descriptions *and* the local topography: a descent straight eastward from the eastern ridge of the caldera towards the Drăgoisasa and the Bilbor Depressions: over a stretch of one mile, the elevation decreases by 300 m. But this descent described by Mina, in this direction or another, was no part of the initial route to the castle.

We know, however, that the highest peak south of the Borgo Pass, the Pietrosul, is ca. 2,060 m high, while the Pass itself is at ca. 1,100 m altitude: over a period of ca. 2¾ hours, the calèche had to negotiate a rise in altitude of nearly 1,000 m at the most.¹⁵ A very cautious assumption would be an average speed of 9 till 10 km/h (a bit faster than the stagecoach)¹⁶ for four “splendid” horses drawing only a light vehicle — somewhat slower when running uphill, faster when running downhill. Based on the assumed duration and chosen speed, the calèche would have removed itself ca. 25¾ (2¾ × 9) till 27½ (2¾ × 10) km from the Pass along the pathways leading away from it; the resulting average slope would be ca. 4 % or less. If we posit a faster speed of 12, 15 or 18 km/h instead, as various sources suggest,¹⁷ the cruising radius would increase to ca. 33, 41¼ or 49½ km along the road respectively;¹⁸ the average slope would be reduced to ca. 3, 2½ or 2 %, which in turn would permit a faster pace. Based on such thoughts, we now can narrow down the target area (see Figure 2).

As the vehicle, per my estimates, covered a stretch of at least 24¾ km along the road, the castle cannot have been in the immediate vicinity of the pass. A trajectory of 49½ km, on the other hand (matching 18 km/h), would correspond to the outer limit of this target area. Accordingly, the beeline distance from the Pass would be, roughly speaking, between 17 and 33 km. Drawing a path on Google Earth shows us that the Izvorul is ca. 35 km away from the Borgo Pass if we follow the pathways starting at Piatra Fântânele in south-east direction, then the Dorna River to its sources, and finally the Via Maria Theresia north-east of the Pietrosul.¹⁹ As the crow flies, the distance is ca. 24 km.

¹⁵ In fact, anyone familiar with the local terrain would avoid a dangerous ride with a calèche across the narrow ridge of the Pietrosul; a more convenient path, ca. 200 m lower, leads north-east of its peak: the Via Maria Theresia (see the last paragraph of this section, and Figures 2 and 5).

¹⁶ The stagecoach from Bistritz to the meeting point also negotiated a height difference of ca. 800 m.

¹⁷ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, lemma “Stagecoach,” informs us that the London-Edinburgh stagecoach travelled its 400-mile route at an average speed of 10 mph, or 16 km/h. Johnson, n.d., mentions 12 mph or 19.3 km/h as the average speed for stagecoaches before 1830. A report by a former inhabitant of Gura Humora, Bukovina, speaks of 20 km/h for a trip crossing the Borgo Pass: “The Austrian army put at our disposal a horse-drawn wagon which took us to Bistritz [the town Bistritz in Transylvania — HdR], and from there we continued on toward Cluj [Klausenburg — HdR] and beyond. For me, as a child, to travel at 20 kilometers per hour on a beautiful summer day [...] was a most delightful experience.” (Yeshurun 1997, 133). A calèche carrying only two persons is much lighter than a stagecoach or wagon filled with passengers and would move accordingly faster.

¹⁸ De Roos 2012b, 26, allowed for up to 11 km to be covered still within the Pass, but on second thought, this seems too generous: Harker’s description gives us the impression that the driver, after calming down the horses at midnight and starting off at a great pace, did not wait long to turn right.

¹⁹ Van Helsing notes, “[...] but soon I see that there be only one such by-road [...]” *Dracula*, 492, Chapter 27, Memorandum by Abraham Van Helsing, 4 November. After studying the maps and exploring the area in person, the path leaving from Piatra Fântânele, near the present Hotel Castel Dracula, seems the most suitable to me to reach the heart of the Călimani Mountains.



Figure 2. Călimani Mountains with the area to find Castle Dracula and with possible routes.

Of course, it is Murray's and Coffey's right to question my proposed time schedule. Perhaps, Harker needed longer for his supper. Perhaps, the driver spent more time at the blue flames, or made further detours (but why then speed so much?). Any scenario allocating less than half of the time between midnight and dawn for the actual driving would seem odd to me, however. Just as well, the "half famished" Harker may have gobbled down his meal, and observing his host's "marked physiognomy" probably did not keep him busy long enough to finish his cigar. Similarly, we cannot be certain about the precise speed. Still, these thought experiments effectively narrow down our target area. As we will see, this comes in handy when we are looking at other clues.

Already since the late eighteenth century, a military pathway, the Via Maria Theresia, connected the Borgo Pass to the Călimani Mountains, in order to provide the Habsburg frontier posts with food and ammunition (see Figures 2 and 5).²⁰ We are not sure, however, whether Stoker ever heard of this road that would have greatly facilitated the trip of the calèche.²¹ In the end, however, neither the real weather and road conditions during a May night in the 1890s nor Stoker's knowledge are decisive here, but the circumstances he described: Harker's Journal does not report any obstacles, except for the wolves, and states that the vehicle "sped onwards through the gloom."²²

3. Stoker's notes mentioning the Izvorul

Despite all imponderabilities, I stand to my thesis that Bram Stoker had the Izvorul in mind as the site of his fictitious castle. Let's look again at the words in Stoker's notes I tried to decipher in January 2012 — words that Murray quotes as well:

R. Sereth
R. Bistritza runs into Sereth
at Fundu
between Strasha & Isvorol²³
is 47 E Long
& 25¼ N. Lat²⁴

²⁰ Austria annexed Bukovina in 1775, so that the Borgo Pass and the adjacent paths became of great importance to the Habsburg Empire. Cionca 2021, 12-17, informs us that the Via Maria Theresia was based on an old Roman road, that it was only completed in 1820, under Emperor Francis I, that it was wider than today, and was said to be suitable for carriages. In 2014, the pathways of the Via Maria Theresia were cleaned up by the local initiative Asociația Tășuleasa Social, and equipped with new signs. To celebrate the re-opening, a mountain-biking and marathon event was held; I attended these events together with Daniela Diaconescu and Petre Tutunea; see De Roos 2015. I also wrote about the Via Maria Theresia in my paper "Count Dracula's Imperial Pathway: Geo-Referencing the Via Maria Theresia on the Josephinian Military Survey;" see De Roos 2014.

²¹ I witnessed people mountain biking and even running a marathon along this same Via Maria Theresia (see previous footnote). The route along the Dorna River is somewhat shorter, but involves a steep section from its sources (ca. 1,500 m) up to the northern flank of the Pietrosul (ca. 1,700 m); I hiked this path in August 2014. I managed to climb the Izvorul twice in 2012, but starting from the Neagra Șaralui Valley, not from Piatra Fântânele.

²² Did Stoker imagine the Count's horses to canter, or even gallop? This would allow for much higher speeds, but the horses would tire sooner. Perhaps, they had supernatural powers, just like their master?

²³ Stoker wrote "Strasha," not "Straska." Strascha" is German for "Straja." We find the spelling "Isvorol" also in Johnston 1864, 278, in Johnston 1868, map 19, for "Isvorol" 47°02" N, 27°06" E (Izvorul Alb?), and in Rand, McNally & Co. 1897, 122 (map), for Izvorul Alb.

²⁴ Document Rosenbach #33b. Eighteen-Bisang and Miller 2008, 112-113.

For me, it seems evident that these six lines, after switching Longitude and Latitude,²⁵ contain *two* statements that are correct, both syntactically and geographically:

- A) “R[iver] Bistritz runs into Sereth at Fundu.” Yes, you can check it on a map.²⁶
- B) “Between Strasha [Straja] & Isvorol [Izvorul] is [a point with the coordinates] 47 N[orth] Lat[itude] & 25¾ E[ast] Long[itude].” Yes, again this is correct, with 1,000 m give and take.

On p. 21, Murray comments:

To me, the reason [Stoker’s “facts”] elude a fact check is that de Roos’ claims go beyond the facts in so far as they can be ascertained by cross-referencing the Rosenbach notes and Dracula’s text. He attempts, for example, to support his case for the location of Castle Dracula by dividing a single note of Stoker’s into two sentences,¹⁰⁴ but it remains a single note pointing only to a disembarkation point in the river, not to the location of Castle Dracula.

104 De Roos, 107, places a full stop after Fundu and capitalises “between” to support his view that Stoker meant to write “two statements here.”

Let’s examine this. Why should we call these six lines a “single note,” although reading them as *one* sentence makes no sense, neither grammatically, nor geographically? “At Fundu between Strasha & Isvorol” — as erroneously conjoined in Eighteen-Bisang’s and Miller’s transcription — is no meaningful expression, because in the whole of Romania, there is no “Fundu” located between a “Strasha” and an “Isvorol”; Eighteen-Bisang and Miller (2008, 113) ignored the obvious line break (see Figure 3).

²⁵ Murray agrees with me on this point; without inversion, the coordinates would refer to a point in the Arabian desert. As can be seen from the original pencil writing, Stoker erroneously overwrote “Lat” with “Lon.” See De Roos 2012b, 61, and De Roos 2017, 108, for details.

²⁶ Meant is the Bistrița Moldoveană, named Bistrița Aurie for its upper part (till its confluence with the Dorna); there is also a River Bistrița in Transylvania, called Bistrița Ardeleană, running through the town of Bistritz. Fundu is just south of Bacău.

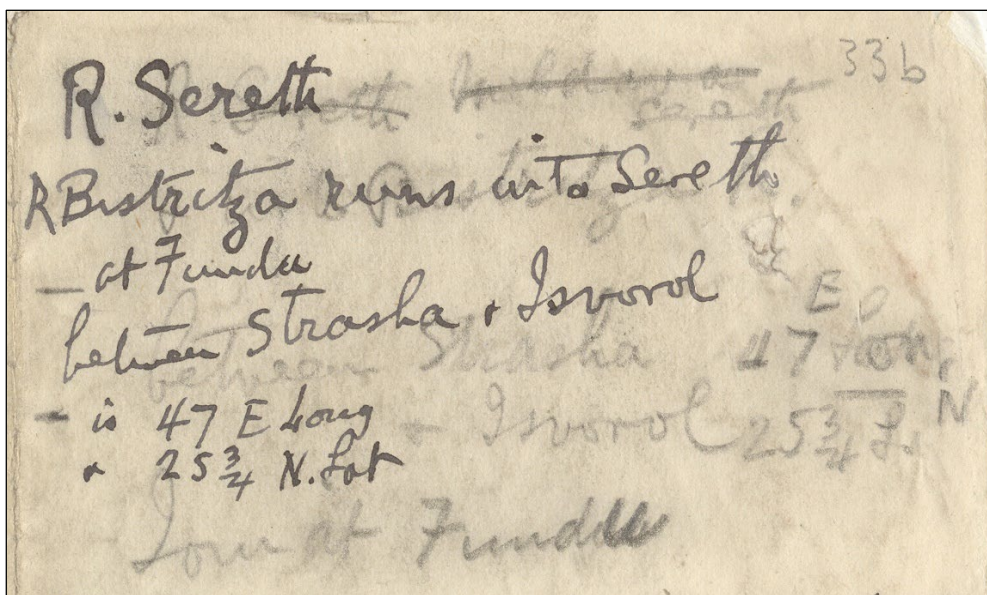


Figure 3. Bram Stoker's note 33b, kept at the Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia.

That Murray's critique does not hold water becomes even clearer if we look at the original text in pencil writing, of which the text written in ink is merely a transcript:

R. Sereth Moldavia
 Sereth
 & xx R. Bistritza
 —
 between Strasha E
 47 Lat Lon,
 --- N
 — & Isvorol 25 3/4 L
 Join at Fundu

This looks like quite a puzzle. Still, for anyone familiar with the rivers Sereth (Siret) and Bistrița, and with the respective locations of Strasha (Straja), Isvorol (Izvorul) and Fundu, it is easy to solve. "Join at Fundu" obviously says something about the rivers Sereth (Siret) and Bistrița, that, as maps show, join exactly there. The cluster at the centre seems to be separated from the rest by dashes, and memorises the coordinates belonging to a certain point between "Strasha" (Straja) and "Isvorol" (Izvorul), that happens to mark the border between Moldavia (Romania) and Transylvania (Austria-

Hungary). While Murray and Coffey at least seem to agree with me that Stoker was plotting the place where the Count's box would leave the River Bistrița, they instantly mix up my findings:

De Roos rightly deduces that the coordinates as written by Stoker should be inverted to 47 degrees North Latitude and 25¼ East Longitude. To me, the meaning of these notes is clear: Stoker is plotting the return journey to Castle Dracula from maps, with the Count and his pursuers going north along the rivers before disembarking at a point around 47 degrees North Latitude and 25¼ East Longitude, between Isvorul and Strasha and continuing cross-country to the castle [...] (Murray 2023, 20)

As explained in my essays, however, the spot marked by these coordinates is not the point of disembarking as Murray believes, but the location *between* this point of disembarking and Mount Izvorul in Transylvania. We may suspect that with these coordinates, Stoker wanted to mark the spot where the Szgany, following the shortest route, would cross the border between Moldavia and Transylvania: the Tulgheș (Hungarian: Tölgyes) Pass. In this sense, the quoted cluster is *not* "pointing only to a disembarkation point in the river," as Murray claims (21): at the same time, it reveals the place of the border crossing, and of the imagined location of Castle Dracula. Failing to understand this means failing to grasp the sense of Stoker's jottings, missing out on the core insight presented in my analysis, and ignoring the hard-to-miss diagrams (De Roos 2012a, 21; De Roos 2012b, 56-57; De Roos 2017, 109, see Figure 4).

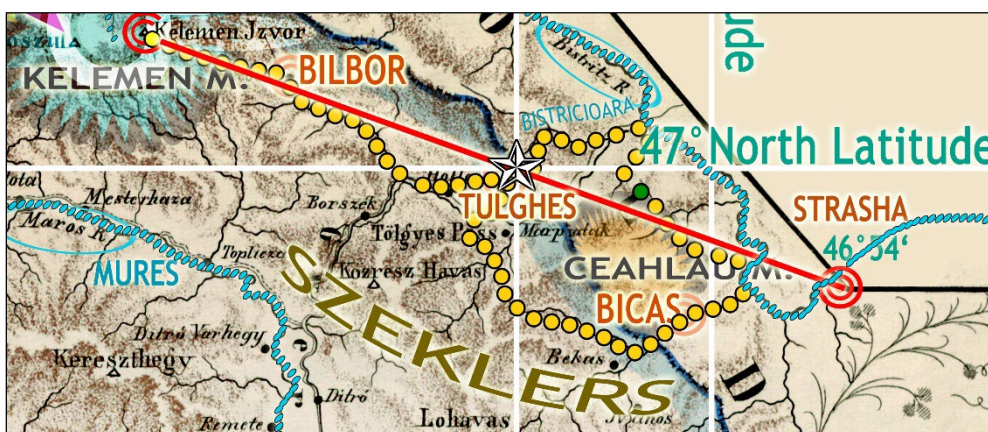


Figure 4. Diagram (detail) included in *Dracula: An International Perspective* (De Roos 2017, 109). In this diagram, the vertical white line crossing Tulgheș is marked as 25°45' East Longitude. The distance from Straja to the discussed coordinates (white star) is ca. 34 km.

Consequently, Murray incorrectly claims that in the novel, “Stoker omits the longitudinal coordinate to conceal the specificity of the location” (20), referring to Harker’s Journal of 30 October:

*We took it, that somewhere about the 47th degree, north latitude, would be the place chosen for crossing the country between the river and the Carpathians.*²⁷

In fact, in Stoker’s imagination, this “point of disembarkation” is in or near Straja in Neamț, Moldavia, located ca. 11 km or 6 arc minutes south of the 47th Parallel, and ca. 32 km or 25 arc minutes east of 25¾° East Longitude, at 26°10’20’ E. From there, it no longer makes sense to follow the River Bistrița, as this would only increase the travel distance to the Transylvanian border.²⁸ On 2 November, morning, Harker writes:

I hope that before we get to Strasba we may see them [“them” refers to Seward and Morris — HdR], for if by that time we have not overtaken the Count, it may be necessary to take counsel together what to do next.

Stoker did not try to conceal the exact location of handing the box containing the Count to the Szgany — which was revealed anyway by mentioning “Strasba” (“Strasha,” “Strascha” or “Straja”²⁹) as a pivotal point, but correctly described it, duly accounting for the fact that Straja was somewhat removed from the 47th Parallel, and even farther from 25¾° East Longitude: a distance of ca. 34 km from the mentioned coordinates — slightly less than the beeline distance from there to the Izvorul (see Figure 4).

Do my claims actually “go beyond the facts in so far as they can be ascertained by cross-referencing the Rosenbach notes and Dracula’s text,” as Murray maintains on p. 21? I do not think so. Stoker mentions the Izvorul as part of a note (or rather, two notes) dealing with the route of the Count’s box:

²⁷ *Dracula*, 484, Chapter 26, Harker’s Journal of 30 October, also quoted by Murray. Murray’s comment replicates Leatherdale 1998, 484n127; see De Roos 2012b, 53, for my critique.

²⁸ Taking the shortcut from Straja to the Tulgheș Pass and from there to the Călimani Mountains saves almost half of the travel distance compared to following the Bistrița up to Vatra Dornei — see De Roos 2012b, 60. Alternative starting points would have been Tarcău or Capșa, ca. 3 km and 5 km west of Straja respectively, where the Bistrița has completed a southward loop, but following the roads instead of the river from Straja on would have been faster. In fact, already from Galați on, both the Count’s men and their pursuers could have travelled faster along the roads instead of navigating the wildly meandering rivers; I suspect that Stoker opted for the waterways only for dramatic effect — see De Roos 2012b, 48n100.

²⁹ Already McNally and Florescu 1979, 265n384, and Wolf 1993, 423n41, proposed “Straja” for “Strasba” as mentioned in *Dracula*.

1. From Galați along the Siret and, from Fundu on, along the Bistrița (Slovaks with boats).
2. From Straja at the Bistrița to the Izvorul, crossing the Transylvanian border at ca. 47° North Latitude, 25°45' East Longitude (Tulgheș/Tölgyes Pass) (Gypsies on horseback with leiter-wagon).

As we know from *Dracula's* last chapter that the Gypsies desperately tried to reach the Count's castle, we may conclude that the word "Isvorol" (Izvorul) signifies the castle's site. No further calculations of travel direction, duration, distance or speed are needed to locate it; Stoker's choice can be reconstructed from the text of his novel in combination with his notes, and it does *not* elude a fact check, because in this case, the facts are Stoker's words themselves, read with common sense.³⁰ Without Stoker's notes, however, the novelist would indeed have succeeded in covering up the exact place he had in mind. Murray does not quite seem to understand these dynamics, as on p. 21, he tries to hold my own thesis — that Stoker obfuscated essential locations on purpose — against me.³¹ But his private notes were never meant to be published, and now provide us with a clue that the writer never intended to give away.

A further doubt raised by Murray:

Using the Rosenbach notes to try to establish the literal truth of Stoker's novel is fraught with risk, not least because many of the notes never made it into the text and what Stoker's intentions actually were in relation to them often cannot be deduced. (Murray 2023, 21-22)

In *Dracula*, Fundu is mentioned five times; both Jonathan and Mina state explicitly that the Bistrița joins the Sereth at Fundu. For Murray, who insists that the six quoted lines form an indivisible "single note," this should be enough to acknowledge that this note did make it into the novel. But as we have seen, Stoker's preparatory fact-finding about

³⁰ The same principle applies to my claim that Bram Stoker did *not* want the historical identity of the Count to be that of Vlad the Impaler: in Chapter 25 of *Dracula*, Van Helsing and Mina agree that the Count is "that other" of the Dracula race, which eliminates the voivode initially described by the Count, linked to the biography of Vlad III. Already in *The Ultimate Dracula*, 223n9, I suggested that Stoker might have studied James Samuelson's *Roumania: Past and Present* (Samuelson 1882), but whether he actually was familiar with this book or not is immaterial: the text of the novel itself rules out the first described voivode as the Count's lifetime identity, and even if Stoker had known all details of Vlad's biography, he would not have picked a recognisable historical person for the lifetime identity of his vampire character.

³¹ Murray: "He concedes, however, that Stoker's supposed "facts" cannot be verified: 'the novel's 'fuzziness' can be understood as a part of Stoker's strategy to attract the maximum of attention with a sensational 'true story' backed up by seemingly authentic details, that upon closer examination, however, elude a fact check.'" With this quote from my own text (De Roos 2017, 110), Murray unsuccessfully tries to demonstrate that my efforts must be futile.

Straja and the 47th Parallel also shows up in *Dracula*, so that we do not have to worry about the first part of Murray's warning.

As for the second part: Why would the novelist Bram Stoker take notes on a line drawn on a map, leading from Straja to Mount Izvorul and crossing the border near the Tulgheș Pass, if this line did not represent a travel route, and the Izvorul was not the destination of this route? And what else could this destination stand for? A butterfly sanctuary? The location of a hidden treasure the Gypsies wanted to pick up on their way to the castle? A touristic belvedere they did not want to miss out on? The site of a resort for lung patients the Count planned to build in the Călimani Mountains? All of this sounds implausible. Applying Occam's Razor, the simplest and most probable answer is that the Izvorul is the site of the castle the Gypsies tried to reach. Since 2012, not a single *Dracula* expert has come up with an alternative interpretation — and Murray fails to do so, too, although his article would be the right place to enlighten us. Although we cannot read Stoker's mind posthumously, we have his written words, and in this point, I agree with Wittgenstein: "But if you say: 'How am I to know what he means, when I see nothing but the signs he gives' then I say: 'How is he to know what he means, when he has nothing but the signs either?'" (Wittgenstein 1958, § 504, 139).

My thesis is supported by a crucial hint that Murray roundly ignores: Mina, standing at the heights near the castle with Van Helsing, knows that Jonathan will be coming from the east, and watches the "river [Bistrița — HdR] lying like a black ribbon in kinks at curls as it wound its way." Staring in this direction, she indeed sees the men approach.³² Within our target area, only the eastern and south-eastern ridge of the caldera grants a view to the Moldavian plains in the east and south-east, especially in the direction of the border crossing marked by Stoker. This solves the question of the calèche's destination: although the information in Harker's Journal of May is incomplete, the route of the calèche must have led to this part of the ridge. With only the peaks of the Reșița, Vârful Bradul Ciont, Vârful Voievodeasa, the Izvorul and the Cserbükk qualifying as suitable locations for the castle,³³ Stoker's scribbled remark about the Izvorul settles the choice between them.

³² *Dracula*, 505, Chapter 27, Mina's Diary of 6 November. Seen from a 2,000 m high peak, the horizon is ca. 160 km away. The River Bistrița between Straja and Roșeni is ca. 70 km away, but the Ceahlău Massif forms an obstacle. At least, the eastern ridge offers an unobstructed view of the area of Bilbor and the "Morile Dracului" from where the Szgany and their pursuers should be coming, after crossing the Transylvanian border at the Tölgyes/Tulgheș Pass.

³³ From the Pietrosul, the Negoii Unguresc, the Negoii Românesc and the Petricelul, the view to the east and south-east is blocked by the other mentioned peaks.

4. Stoker's four narrative pegs

To be clear, I do not believe that Stoker's description matches the physical properties of the terrain south of the Borgo Pass in every single detail. What I *do* believe is that Bram Stoker, while preparing his novel, picked four pegs to set up his narrative structure. To settle on a geographical framework for the last chapters, he selected Straja and the Izvorul as the start and finish of the shortest route the Gypsies would take to get from the River Bistrița to their master's home. The other two pegs relate to the time frame of Harker's trip with the Count. Having the driver of the calèche leave the Borgo Pass only at midnight may have been a *symbolic* choice: at that point in time, St. George's Night properly started and evil was set loose; the blue flames became visible. Daybreak as the moment to interrupt the Count's cozy conversation with his guest was a *necessary* choice: as a vampire, Dracula was supposed to retract at sunrise.³⁴ This means that Phase II of Harker's trip with the calèche had to be fitted in between these two moments. We do not know, however, whether the novelist ever cared to harmonise this time frame with the actual location of the Izvorul, the properties of the available pathways, and the strength of the horses; it may well be that he merely accounted for the beeline distance, and never checked the exact time of dawn or sunrise for May 5. As he was covering up the location of the castle anyway, he could accept a certain vagueness, or even errors and contradictions,³⁵ in the travel logs — in fact, such fuzziness served the overarching purpose of constructing a story that could not be invalidated. But Mina's information offers an independent clue that allows us to narrow down the site of the castle to a few square kilometres. Therefore, our inability to calculate the precise speed of the calèche and the distance it covered does not affect my conclusion about the intended location of the castle. Within the framework formed by these four pegs, Stoker filled in the details as he saw fit — sometimes accurately, sometimes liberally. About the landscape, Murray remarks,

In "Dracula", the route to the castle is crowded with trees and Jonathan Harker does not describe any landscape that matches that of Mount Izvorul Călimanului; the Count is able to drive his carriage right into the courtyard of his castle, a feat that a lack of roads and the gradient on Mount Izvorul Călimanului would have rendered difficult, to say the least. (Murray 2023, 19)

³⁴ Count Dracula, however, did not have the same vulnerability as Count Orlok and other later vampires, who were subject to spontaneous combustion when exposed to sunlight.

³⁵ In November, Van Helsing and Mina need almost two full days to travel the same route from the Borgo Pass to the castle the Count's calèche needed only a few hours for. Perhaps, the much heavier snowfall in November was the cause. Or Stoker delayed the professor and his protégée so that they would not arrive in the vicinity of Castle Dracula much earlier than the Szgany and their pursuers; see De Roos 2012b, 50, for this possibility.

From my experience in hiking and biking the terrain south of the Borgo Pass, I can confirm that almost *all* pathways in this area lead through forests. The tree line is only at ca. 1,650-1,800 m. A barren mountain top such as the Izvorul, the destination of the calèche, would only show up at the end of the trip, after climbing up to this altitude. The reason Harker fails to describe it is that he has fallen asleep by then. As for the driver being “able to drive his carriage right into the courtyard of his castle,” one could argue that once the southern ridge of the Călimani caldera has been reached at the Șaua Negoiu saddle (ca. 1,700 m), the route along the Pietricelul and Rețiș, roughly following the border of Harghita and Suceava County to get to the Izvorul, is not particularly steep; unlike Stoker’s dramatic description in the last chapters, the area leading to the Izvorul’s highest elevation forms a rather smooth plane (see Figure 5).³⁶ Just as well, however, it is possible that Stoker simply assumed that every castle should be reachable by carriage, and did not care to check this detail, or be consistent about it.

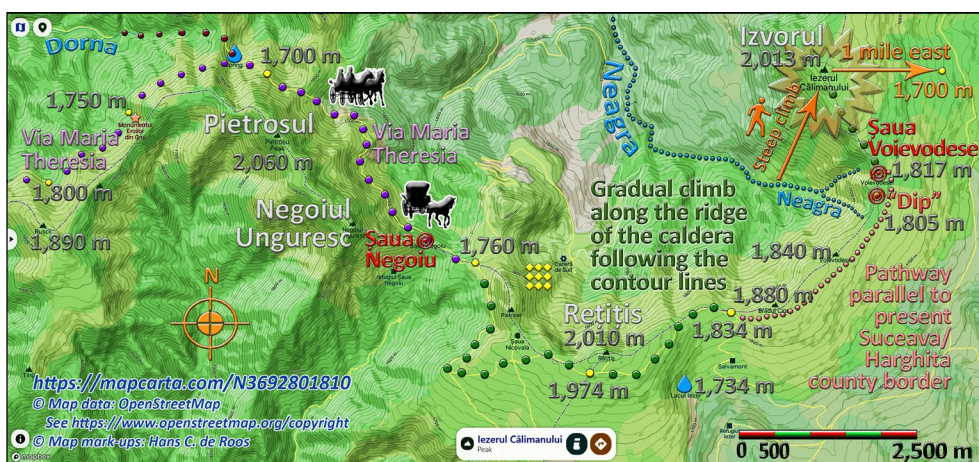


Figure 3. The highest peaks are marked in white, the discussed saddle points in red. The Via Maria Theresia leads north-east of the Pietrosul and Negoiu Unguresc. The pathways along the caldera ridge follow the contour lines. East of the Izvorul, the terrain descends 300 m over a stretch of one mile.

This also applies to the description questioned by Murray next, about the castle allegedly standing at “the very edge of a terrific precipice. A stone falling from the

³⁶ After the Rețiș, the route along the ridge of the caldera descends until it reaches a “dip” at 1,803 m, just south of the Șaua Voievodesei. Over a stretch of 2.1 km, the path climbs again until at an elevation of 2,013 m, the peak of the Izvorul is reached. The average incline of 10% corresponds to an angle of 5.7°, which should pose no problem to a team of four “splendid” horses drawing a light calèche. Over the last 500 m, the pitch is only 7.4% or 4%.

window would fall a thousand feet without touching anything!” Mount Izvorul indeed has a promontory from where a barren slope steeply runs down over 350 m, until it reaches the tree line at ca. 1,650 m altitude; it is the inner wall of the volcanic cauldron, west of the Izvorul summit. I did not dare to throw a stone, but I assume it would hit this wall several times before reaching the trees.³⁷ I would ascribe this remark about the precipice to Stoker’s fantasy, not to some geographical information the novelist might have collected about the actual shape of the Izvorul.

Murray objects:

Quite why Stoker would have wanted to locate Dracula’s castle on top of a bare mountain in the middle of a wilderness is not explained. Medieval fortresses were built in strategic locations for both protection and control and Dracula’s vast castle would surely have been designed to fulfil rational objectives. (Murray 2023, 21)

In this point, I assume, Stoker’s wish to stay close to reality collided with the need to cover up his tracks. If he would have picked a site of truly strategic importance, it would already have possessed its own fortress and historical reputation: it would be difficult to insert a new castle there, or to suggest that the existing fortification in fact was a vampire lair. The same principle applies to Walpole’s Castle of Otranto (1764), Ann Radcliffe’s Castle di Udolpho (1794), Karl von Wachsmann’s ruined Klatka Castle (1847), the castles belonging to Carmilla’s father, General Spielsdorf, Count Carlsfeld, and the Karnsteins respectively, described in J. Sheridan le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872), and Jules Verne’s castle in the Carpathians (1892): none of these fortifications were located at sites that were publicly known for their military significance. Placing a fictitious castle at an unspecified or obscure site was nothing new; what is remarkable is that Stoker consulted detailed maps to pick such a place, and that his notes on this choice have survived until today. To his readers, of course, it should remain unclear that this was a bare mountain top — hence the cover-up, which was successful until I deciphered the meaning of his note on the Izvorul.

A question I sometimes asked myself is whether Stoker knew that the Izvorul peak was part of the caldera of a huge extinct volcano.³⁸ Possibly, he did — as the volcanic nature of the Călimani Mountains was already described in 1791 (Fichtel 1791, 141-158)³⁹ and the sulphur deposits at the Negoiu received attention in the 1860s

³⁷ Measuring the distances on Google Earth teaches us that gradient of this slope is ca. 50%.

³⁸ Or formed by the collapse of several volcanoes. For a geological description of the area, see Băca 2011.

³⁹ Fichtel refers to the Călimani Mountains as “Kelemen-Hawasch,” after their Hungarian name. His book was discussed by “Alvand,” who cites the volcanic origins (“Alvand” 1792, 483).

(Kremnitzki 1854; 1866a; 1866b; 1867). But perhaps, it was pure coincidence that in the Donaldson typescript, the whole summit was said to erupt;⁴⁰ we simply do not know.

5. Was Stoker negligent in his research? Navigating the Bistrița River

The last part of Murray's review is dedicated to pointing out that in the eyes of various scholars, Stoker was negligent in his research. As I demonstrated in "The Dracula Maps" already, this is a critique that in several instances happened to blow up in the face of the critics.

According to Duncan Light, Murray writes, Stoker was unaware that Moldavia was part of Romania (22). In Chapter 26 of *Dracula*, however, we read:

*We have now passed into the Bistrizta; and if we are wrong in our surmise our chance is gone. We have over-hauled every boat, big and little. Early this morning, one crew took us for a Government boat, and treated us accordingly. We saw in this a way of smoothing matters, so at Fundu, where the Bistrizta runs into the Sereth, we got a Roumanian flag which we now fly conspicuously.*⁴¹

Harker and Stoker correctly acknowledge that Moldavia was a part of the Romanian state. Upon checking Light's text, I found that he quoted the same incident, but found fault with the fact that Harker, in the novel's opening lines, called Moldavia a "state," next to Transylvania and Bukovina, "when in fact Moldavia was then part of the state of Romania" (Light 2005, 39). If we want to be entirely precise, however, Transylvania and Bukovina were no independent states either, but parts of the Austro-Hungarian territory. Light fails to mention this. Should we call his knowledge of the Dual Monarchy "extremely hazy" now?

As a next example, Murray (22) quotes Leatherdale's remark about "[t]he nonsensical speed with which steam launches, pack-horses, and carriages ridden by old men and frail women can traverse a lunar landscape," allegedly showing that Stoker's "topographical knowledge was limited."⁴² In "The Dracula Maps," my analysis demonstrated that Leatherdale was wrong, just like the learned geographers Gerard Walker and Lorraine Wright, who failed at correctly converting miles to

⁴⁰ "At the same moment with a roar which seemed to shake the very heavens the whole castle and the rock and even the hill on which it stood seemed to rise into the air and scatter in fragments while a mighty cloud of black and yellow smoke volume on volume in rolling grandeur was shot upwards with inconceivable rapidity. From where we stood it seemed as if the one fierce volcano burst had satisfied the need of nature [...]" Quoted from Miller 2005, 73.

⁴¹ *Dracula*, 485-486, Chapter 26, Jonathan Harker's Journal of 1 November.

⁴² Murray took this particular quote from Leatherdale 1998, 486n138.

kilometres⁴³ and counting Van Helsing's and Mina's days of travelling.⁴⁴ Leatherdale noticed the pair's second day of travelling from the Borgo Pass and the discrepancy with Harker's trip (Leatherdale 1998, 494n34), but this difference meant the coupling travelled *slowly*, not fast. More importantly, he failed to understand Harker's remarks about the Count's men planning to leave the River Bistrița near the 47th Parallel and the pivotal role of Straja (Leatherdale 1998, 484n127).

Murray himself is not immune from avoidable errors either. On p. 20, he states:

[...] what [Stoker] could not have known by studying a map was that the river here [meaning at the point of disembarking—HdR] was a small stream which could hardly have accommodated a toy boat, let alone the steam launch manned by the Count's pursuers.

I do not know what induced Paul Murray to write this. Is this still a relic of Leatherdale's 1998 assumption that the Count's box left the Bistrița River only at Vatra Dornei, near its source far up in the north?⁴⁵ Or did Murray and Coffey indeed, as their article states, look at the point indicated by Stoker's — inverted — coordinates, near Tulgheș/Tölgyes, where there is very little water to be found — and certainly no Bistrița River?⁴⁶ Whatever the case, fact is that the Moldavian Bistrița near the 47th Parallel already was and is a sizeable waterway. The precise situation of the 1890s is difficult to judge, as in

⁴³ Walker and Wright 1997, 69, convert 70 miles to 44 km, instead of 113 km. For my critique, see De Roos 2012b, 50, and the diagrams posted on my website.

⁴⁴ See De Roos 2012b, 50. On November 1 and 2, Van Helsing and Mina drive from Verești to the Borgo Pass, arriving there on the morning of November 3: more than two full days. From there, they continue by carriage from November 3, early morning, till November 4, late afternoon: almost two full days. Walker and Wright 1997, 70, speaks of a "three-day carriage journey over mountainous terrain into the heart of the Carpathians." If the two-day carriage trip from Verești to the Borgo Pass is meant to be included, one day is missing here; if it should *not* be included, it is one day too much.

⁴⁵ See again Leatherdale 1998, 484n127. In his footnote 96 on p. 20, Murray maintains that in my 2017 essay, I did not dispute Leatherdale's statement about the Bistrița being "little more than a stream" at the "disembarkation point." On pp. 104-110 of my text, I indeed focused on Leatherdale's most fundamental mistake: his assumption that Vatra Dornei was at or near the 47th Parallel and that Stoker intended to let the Count's box travel all along the River Bistrița till near its sources. As this fallacy rendered his argumentation mute from the start, I did not even examine the historical width of the Bistrița at Vatra Dornei, far removed from the disembarkation point. Photos from the interbellum, however, show that timber rafts could also pass there.

⁴⁶ Murray: "Brian entered the latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates as inverted by de Roos on Google Maps, which took us to a remote spot on the Bistrița River which might indeed have seemed reasonable to Stoker as a point of disembarkation." (20). Something must have gone wrong here. At 47° N. Latitude, 25¼ E. Longitude, Google Earth shows unpopulated mountainous terrain with an altitude of ca. 1,400 m, ca. 2¼ km west of the border between Harghita County (Transylvania) and Neamț County (Moldavia), and ca. 4 km north of the Tulgheș Pass. There are some creeks near this spot, but no rivers; the river that flows through the Tulgheș Pass is the Bistricoara, not the Bistrița.

the 1950s and 60s, a huge accumulation lake has been created between Roşeni and the new town of Dodeeni, and the river has been regulated further north as well.⁴⁷ The Third Austro-Hungarian Survey of ca. 1870-1920, however, shows that at Straja, the Bistriţa was considerably wider than its many local tributaries, such as the Potoci, Tarcău, and Oanţu (right) or Capşa and Pângăraţi (left).

As to the navigability of the Bistriţa during this period, assessments differ. A US Government publication lists it as “navigable” (US State Department 1873, 702). Captain W. S. Cooke mentions “the Bistritz, near Bakeu, bridged at Largu, Pingaracora, Bistriţa, Roznovu, and Bakeu (in three places); though not navigable, this stream is seldom fordable at normal water level.” (Cooke 1876, 100). Black’s *Military Geography* mentions “Bacău, a road and rail junction at the confluence of the Bistriţa with the Sereth, both of which are more or less navigable by grain-rafts.” In a footnote, the authors specify, “The Bistriţa is usually, however, neither navigable nor fordable.” (Lyde 1905, 83). The *Österreichische Statistik des Verkehrs* (Traffic Statistics) for 1892-93 categorises the “Bistritz (goldene)” as only navigable for rafts, commenting, “This river is an excellent rafting route, that is intensively used to float shipbuilding lumber and cut timber.” (Bureau der k. k. statistischen Central-Commission 1895, Part 3, xv).⁴⁸

I indeed could not find any historical photos of ships on the Bistriţa; cattle, sheep, stones, shingles, stakes, sticks, hay, goat’s cheese and sour milk were transported by rafts (Cojocaru-Ţuiac 2010, discussed by Sofronia 2021). A notable exception is the large pontoon-ferry at the pavilion Peste Vale in Piatra Neamţ that could carry as much as fifty people, and was photographed for postcards of the early 1900s (see Figure 6); Prof. Dumitru Rusu describes the location and the ferry in an article (Rusu 2016).⁴⁹

⁴⁷ For a detailed description of the changes, see Lăzărescu 1958, 10-12.

⁴⁸ “Dieser Fluss ist eine vorzüglich gute Flossstrasse, die sehr stark zur Flössung von Schiffsbauhölzern und von Schnittmaterial benützt wird.”

⁴⁹ Peste Vale was located underneath Mount Cernegura, on the right bank of the Bistriţa, only 16 km downstream from Straja. Today, it houses a modern swimming pool.

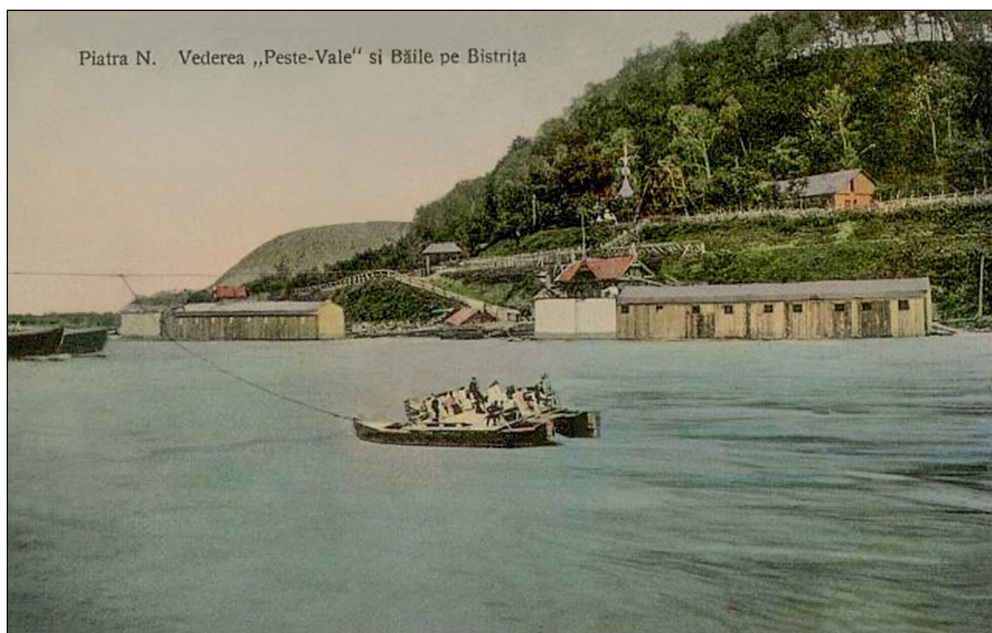


Figure 4. Ferry at Peste Vale, 16 km downstream from Straja. On the left, two ships seem to be visible.

A book with memories of Jewish people who lived in Gura Humora, Bukovina, during the interbellum, however, mentions a boat trip on the Bistrița:

Once, my friend Ignatz Ellenbogen organised a nice excursion. We were to take the train to Campulung, from there climb the 1,600 m. high Rarau mountain, sleep over on the summit, descent the next morning on the far side toward the Bistritza. On the Bistritza by riverboat to Piatra Neamt, and from there by foot and train back to Gura Humora. No words can describe this outing. [...]

Down to the Bistritza. The river Bistritza is much wider than the Moldova, thus navigable. The distance to Piatra Neamt, however, was longer than we thought, so we stopped over in Brosteni and slept over in peasant's barn. The next morning, we walked to Negruleasa, took the train to Stulpicani, on foot to Frasin, and the last leg from Frasin by train to Gura Humora. (Yeshurun 1997, 120)

If this travel story from the late 1920s or early 30s is accurate — I have no reason to doubt it — riverboats transported passengers from Chiril (south-west of Mount Rarău) south to Broșteni, a stretch of ca. 27 km. We may conclude that navigability was in the

eye of the beholder: it was the raftsmen, ship's captain or boat owner who had to judge the weather and the water level, and decide whether the trip was worth the risk.⁵⁰

Further clues can be derived from the history of raft floating on the Bistrița. The larger rafts consisted "of tens of cubic meters of wood" (Capșa 1931, 7)⁵¹ and although they had no keel, a sufficient depth and width of water was needed to manoeuvre them. Had the Bistrița really been too small for a toy boat at Stoker's "point of disembarkation," as Murray claims (21), the rafts floating downstream never could have reached the timber yards and paper mills of Piatra Neamț and Bacău, or the port of Galați. Photos taken by Adolph Chevallier in the 1920s till 40s show these large rafts tied together floating down the Bistrița. Such rafts must have passed Straja on their way south, as confirmed by a report harking back to this time.⁵²

The memoirs of the Russian Foreign Minister Nicholas Karlovich Giers, written around 1873-1875, describe the village of Hangu, ca. 35 km upstream from Straja:

The pretty frame houses of Hangu are scattered along the shores of the noisy rushing water of the River Bistrița, which is used to float timber. [...] The entire wealth of the area is the forests which abound in magnificent mast timber. [...] From Hangu the timber was floated down the Bistrița and the Siret to the Danube, and from there it was distributed all over Europe. This timber is also used for large rafts with float rapidly down the current. (Jelavich 1962, 178)

A detailed geological description of the Bistrița Valley from the year 1899 mentions the rapids between Dealu Ursului and Barnaru, that, according to the text, were feared by the raftsmen: a confirmation that timber rafting was practiced already at that latitude, well north of Holda and the Royal Domain of Broșteni (Athanasiu 1899, 257). In his book *The Bistrița Valley*, Eusebio Camilar describes a trip across the same rapids (Camilar 1957, 6).⁵³ A photo album published by Julius Dutkiewicz in 1883 shows the rafts and timber industry near Broșteni (Dutkiewicz 1883).

⁵⁰ "But the raftsmen is not only a good helmsman, he also is an expert judge of the signs of the weather. He knows — intuitively — by the signs of the sky, when he should, or should not, start his trip." (Dar, nu numai cărmaciul bun este plutașul, ci și un bun cunoscător a semnelor vremii. El știe — intuitiv — după semnele cerului, când trebuie sau nu, să plece la drum." (Capșa 1931, 7) [My transl. — HdR].

⁵¹ "Bistrița este cel mai activ cărăuș al Moldovei. Pe spinarea, ei alunecă — cu aceeași ușurință cu care plutesc iarna sloiurile de gheață — plute de zeci de metri cubi de lemn." [My transl. — HdR]. Quoted in "Plutăritul pe Bistrița Aurie, înainte de 'supunerea' ei prin construcția barajului de la Bicaz (File de istorie locală)" 2023. "Development of Rumania's Timber Industry" 1956, 5, informs us, "On the Bistrița Valley, [...] 10,000-12,000 cubic metres of log in a day are transported by rafts. At present the transport capacity by raft is double that of the past."

⁵² Grasu 2015 describes Măciucași (now Tarcău), Neamț, at the confluence of Bistrița and Tarcău, with the "rafts gliding hurriedly down towards Piatra, Bacău and even up to Galați." [My transl. — HdR].

⁵³ Camilar reports: "Mount Scăricea and Dealul Ursului loomed up ahead of us. And so we reached the Toance rapids. Now, caught in the stranglehold of the crags closing in, the Bistrița becomes a



Figure 5. Raft at the Bistrița in Iacobeni, 140 km upstream from Straja, in 1929. Photographer unknown.

A travel log states that even as far north as Cârlibaba, at the foot of the Rodnei Mountains, where the Cârlibaba Creek joins the Golden Bistrița, the local men worked as rafters, after the silver and lead mines founded by Karl Manz, Knight of Mariensee, were closed in 1870 (Capper 2006).⁵⁴ This is confirmed by another travel report:

[...] the most significant [...] economic activity on the Golden Bistrița was [...] timber rafting. Opening the sluices at Cârlibaba made the water level of the river rise, and then the raftsmen began their dangerous journey through the night. Many lost their lives in the rapids between Dorna Arini⁵⁵ and Holda. Countless logs were transported floating on the river from Dorna to Holda, Broșteni or Piatra Neamț, and then continued via the Siret, up till the Danube. Only when the

foaming torrent. [...] Many raftsmen have lost their lives here at Toance.” “River Bistrița Changes Its Century Old Course” 1957, 4, also mentions the Toance gorges and their risks.

⁵⁴ See also “Povestea așezărilor bucovinene (revăzută): Cârlibaba” n. d. for historical details.

⁵⁵ Camilar 1957, 3, also mentions Dorna Arini, 7 km east of Vatra Dornei, as the starting point of a raft trip.

Bicaz accumulation lake was created in the early 1960s, the era of timber rafting on the Bistrița River came to an end. (Kienas, 2008)⁵⁶

If the river was “seldom fordable at normal water level” (Cooke), we may assume that at its central channel, the stream was at least waist-deep. And if massive timber rafts could pass at Hangu, Barnaru, Dorna Arini, Iacobeni (see Figure 7) and Cârlibaba, we may suspect that a “swift little steamboat” (Van Helsing)⁵⁷ with a shallow draught (see Figure 8) was able to reach Straja from the south as well; at least, the idea was not as far-fetched as Murray suggests.



Figure 6. Steam launch *Osprey*, built 1902, at the Windermere Jetty Museum. Photo: Nthep, 2019. Photo straightened. CC Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license (Wikimedia).

⁵⁶ “[...] die wohl wichtigste [...] Tätigkeit auf der Goldenen Bistritz war jedoch die Holzflößerei. Die geöffneten Schleusen in Cârlibaba ließen den Pegel des Flusses ansteigen und mit diesem starteten die Flößer zu ihrer gefährlichen Fahrt durch die Nacht. Viele verloren ihr Leben in den Stromschnellen auf der Strecke zwischen Dorna Arini und Holda. Unzählige Stämme wurden auf dem Rücken des Flusses von Dorna nach Holda, Broșteni oder bis Piatra Neamț und weiter auf dem Siret bis zur Donau transportiert. Erst mit dem Bicaz-Stausee ging Anfang der 60er Jahre des letzten Jahrhunderts die Epoche der Flößerei auf der Bistritz zu Ende.” [My translation — HDR]. For a detailed history of rafting on the Bistrița, see Cojocaru-Țuiac 2013.

⁵⁷ *Dracula*, 481, Chapter 26, Mina Harker’s Journal – Monday, 30 October (continued).

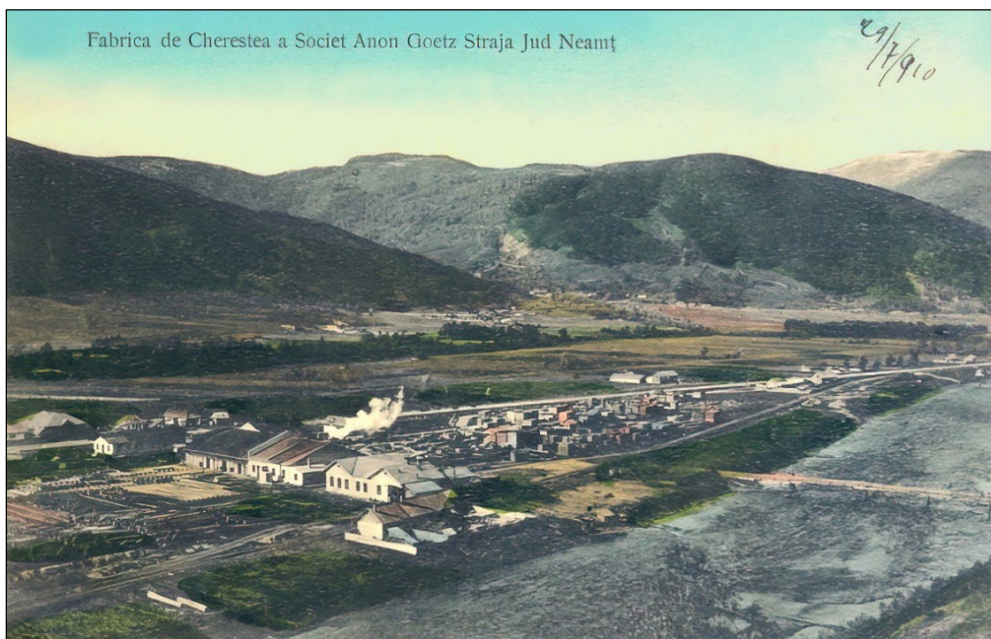


Figure 7. River Bistrița at Straja with the Goetz SA lumber factory. Photographer unknown

Figure 9 shows the lumber factory SA Goetz, located in Straja, next to the Bistrița, during the interbellum; the river seems at least 25-30 m wide here. Today, rubber boats and RIBs are used on the northern part of the Bistrița for sport, leisure and tourism, while the fire brigades in Bacău, Neamț and Borca employ metal rescue boats. These motorised vessels, about the same size as a small steam launch, can hold up to 6-8 persons. Harker's and Holmwood's journey certainly was not without risks — rocks and rapids could damage the hull, as Stoker was well aware of; Seward's Diary mentions such an accident.⁵⁸ But to claim that the Bistrița at the disembarkation point “was a small stream which could hardly have accommodated a toy boat” (20) would be an error; Murray, just like Leatherdale, must have looked at the wrong location.

⁵⁸ *Dracula*, 487, Chapter 26, Dr. Seward's Diary, 4 November.

6. Conclusions

Murray concludes, “Instead of trying to determine an exact location for Castle Dracula, it might be more logical to see it as a magical place” (22). I fully agree that Stoker wanted to present the castle as a mythical location; already in 2012, I compared Stoker’s description to that of the Grail Castle, that cannot be found on purpose, only by guidance (De Roos 2012a, 22; De Roos 2012b, 66). But before Stoker obfuscated his tracks, he did his homework first and managed to include such obscure places as Fundu, Straja, and Verești in his narrative. If Murray and Coffey had done their homework as well and studied my texts more diligently, their judgment would have been different. My examination of time frame, direction, distance and speed of Harker’s trip was far from “useless,” as it greatly narrowed down the area where the castle could be located. Combining this with Mina’s remark on watching the River Bistrița from her elevated viewpoint helped to specify the possible sites. Finding Stoker’s note referring to the Izvorul was the third component. Although this note alone would have been sufficient to determine the place the novelist had in mind, I might not have recognised it for what it was if I had not studied the peaks of the Călimani caldera first. Here lies the reason, I believe, why neither Leatherdale (1998, 479n86) nor Eighteen-Bisang and Miller (2008, 113) were able to extract any useful information from it. Splitting the lines into two separate statements was not a trick to save an otherwise untenable theory, but the result of thoroughly exploring the context. Murray and Coffey mistake the coordinates of the border crossing for those of the disembarkation point, and place the latter 25 km west of the River Bistrița’s actual course. Such gaffes create more confusion than clarity.

My thesis that Stoker picked the Izvorul as the castle’s site does not mean that every detail of the novel’s travel accounts should match the local landscape; even novels featuring famous landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower do not need to be accurate in all their travel descriptions. Murray criticises that the Izvorul neither has a “terrific precipice” nor a convenient driveway nor strategic importance, but if this were to rule out Mount Izvorul as the intended location of the castle, not a single mountain top between the Borgo Pass and the River Mureș would qualify as its site. Still, we can be sure that Stoker imagined the Count’s stronghold to be located somewhere in this area. We may conclude that such a critique is not suitable to disprove my thesis.

The fact that Stoker’s research had its lacunae does not mean that he was unable to pick places from a map and weave his story around them. Ironically, the novelist seems to have been more familiar with Transylvanian and Moldavian geography than many of his modern critics, Leonard Wolf, Gerard Walker and Lorraine Wright, Clive Leatherdale, Leslie S. Klinger and now Murray himself included, who all go astray in interpreting the clues the writer left us. In order to demonstrate that Stoker’s

“topographical knowledge was limited,” quoting comments by Leatherdale I already in 2012 proved to be off target is not helpful.

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NOTE: All elevations are given as indicated by Google Earth; heights may differ from those given on other maps, such as <https://muntii-nostri.ro/> or old Habsburg military maps.