Dracula's castle?

Bran Castle and the evidence | Studying Dracula | Version 3 | November 2026

The question. Bran Castle, near Brașov in Romania, markets itself to the world as "Dracula's Castle". How far does Bram Stoker's novel support that claim? And what do you think Bram himself would have made of it?

Many visitors associate Bran Castle with Dracula. This sheet gives you the evidence to weigh: what the novel says, what Bran is, what Bram could have seen, and how the castle came by its fame. Decide for yourself, then compare your verdict with others'.



George Pearson, engraving of Bran Castle (“Castle of Terzburg”) in Charles Boner, *Transylvania: Its Products and Its People* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1865), p. 278. Public domain. From a copy in the Bram Stoker Estate collection.

Evidence A: what the novel says

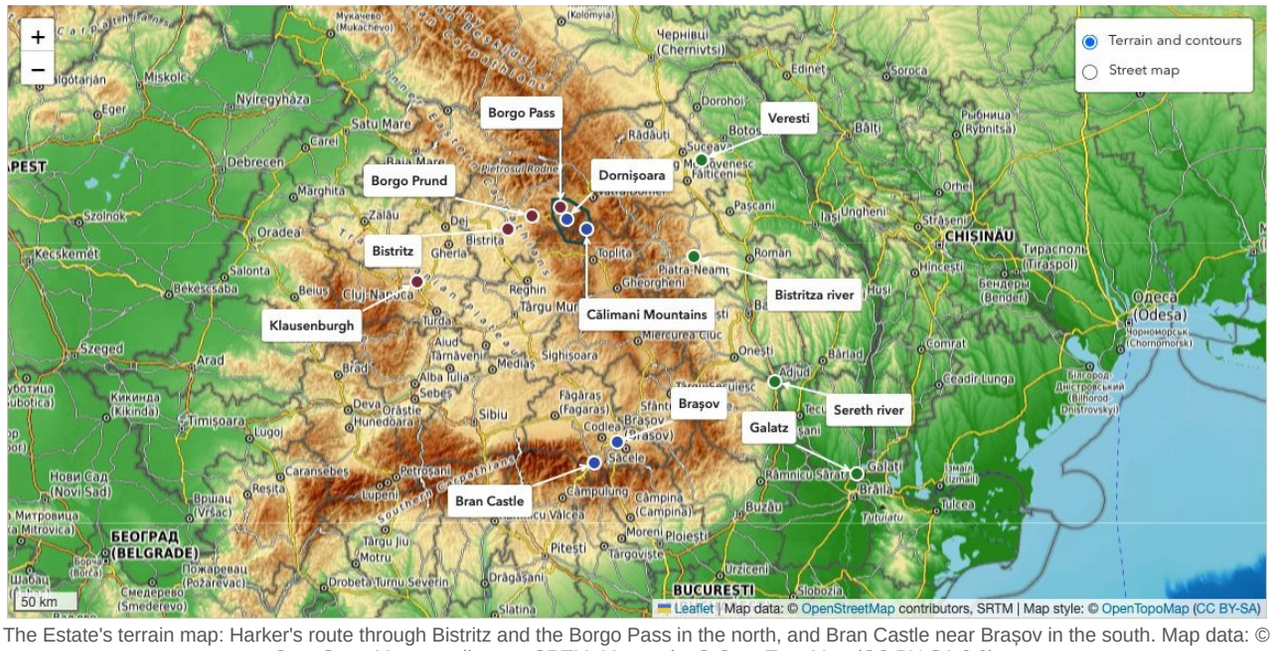
Harker travels from Bistritz through the Borgo Pass. Mark these details on the map below.

- The castle stands in "the extreme east of the country, just on the borders of three states, Transylvania, Moldavia and Bukovina". (Chapter 1)
- Before he leaves London, Harker cannot find any map "giving the exact locality of the Castle Dracula". (Chapter 1)
- The Count writes: "At the Borgo Pass my carriage will await you". (Chapter 1)
- Harker arrives in "the courtyard of a vast ruined castle", with "broken battlements" against the sky. (Chapter 1)
- The Count himself says: "the walls of my castle are broken". (Chapter 2)
- "The castle is on the very edge of a terrible precipice." (Chapter 2)
- "The castle was built on the corner of a great rock, so that on three sides it was quite impregnable". (Chapter 3)
- Mina sees it at the end "perched a thousand feet on the summit of a sheer precipice". (Chapter 27)

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The Estate's terrain map: Harker's route through Bistritz and the Borgo Pass in the north, and Bran Castle near Brașov in the south. Map data: © OpenStreetMap contributors, SRTM. Map style: © OpenTopoMap (CC BY-SA 3.0).

Evidence B: what Bran Castle is

- A real fortress, first documented in 1377, when Louis I of Hungary allowed the Saxons of Kronstadt (Brașov) to build a stone castle guarding the mountain pass between Transylvania and Wallachia. It also served as a customs post.
- In 1920 the town of Brașov gave it to Queen Marie of Romania, who remodelled it as a summer home. Seized by the communist state in 1948, it became a museum; it was returned to her family's heirs in 2006 and is now a private museum.
- Bran Castle markets itself as “Dracula’s Castle”. That modern association does not by itself establish a connection with the castle in Stoker’s novel.
- It lies in the far south of Transylvania, about 200 km from the Borgo Pass. The novel never names it.
- Its link to Vlad III, the fifteenth-century prince known as Dracula, is slight: he may have passed along the road below, but historians do not accept that he lived or was imprisoned there. Bram’s notes take the name “Dracula” and a little history from William Wilkinson’s book (1820), but they do not name Vlad, describe impaling or connect the Count with Bran.

Evidence C: what Bram could have seen

Bram never visited Romania; he built Transylvania from books and maps. Among the books he used was Charles Boner's Transylvania: Its Products and Its People (1865), which the Estate's website shows on What inspired Dracula. Boner's book includes a full-page picture called "Castle of Terzburg" (Terzburg or Törzburg is the German name for Bran) and praises the castle as the very ideal of a romantic fortress. So Bram could have seen a picture of Bran. But no note or letter of his says he used it, and a picture is not a location.

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Charles Boner's map of Transylvania (1865), from a book Bram used. Courtesy of the Bram Stoker Estate.

Evidence D: how Bran became "Dracula's Castle"

- The historian Duncan Light shows that Western visitors and tour operators began calling Bran "Dracula's Castle" in the 1960s, because, perched on its rock with towers and turrets, it "looks the part". The novel was not published in Romania until 1990.
- Before 1989 the Romanian authorities tolerated the label rather than promoting it; afterwards it became a commercial asset.
- The castle's own website describes Bran as "the only one in Transylvania that corresponds to Bram Stoker's description". The same website also asks visitors to distinguish the castle's real history from the fictional Count.
- Archduke Dominic, whose family owns the castle, said in 2016 that visitors "come for Dracula" but "leave with the queen".

Evidence E: what Bram said and did

- Asked in 1897 whether his novel taught a lesson, he answered: "I suppose that every book of the kind must contain some lesson ... but I prefer that readers should find it out for themselves." (*British Weekly*, 1 July 1897)
- He and Florence guarded his rights carefully. On 18 May 1897, a week before publication, he staged a reading of *Dracula: or The Un-Dead* at the Lyceum Theatre to secure the stage rights. After his death, Florence went to court against the unlicensed film *Nosferatu* (1922) and won an order for its prints to be destroyed.
- For 27 years (1878–1905) he was Henry Irving's business manager, most of that time at the Lyceum Theatre: he knew a great deal about audiences, publicity and selling tickets.

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Task 1: weigh the claim

The claim	Evidence for	Evidence against
Bran is the castle Bram describes		
Bran is where Bram placed the castle		
Bran is linked to the historical Dracula, Vlad III		
Bran inspired how the castle looks		

Your verdict: how far does the novel support the claim?

Task 2: what would Bram have thought?

No one knows: he left no comment on real places identified with his fiction. Use Evidence E to argue for one view, and say what evidence would change your mind.

- He might be flattered that an imagined castle has helped create a popular destination.
- He might object to a building he never named being presented as literal literary history.
- His experience of theatre publicity might make him interested in how a fictional association attracts visitors.
- He might distinguish an imaginative association from a claim about his sources.
- Another view of your own.

Extension: other claimants

Poienari Castle (Vlad III's real fortress), Corvin Castle at Hunedoara (a legend of Vlad's imprisonment), Slains Castle near Cruden Bay (Bram stayed in the village while working on the novel) and the Hotel Castel Dracula at the Borgo Pass (completed 1983) all claim a link. Which has the best claim, and on what does each rest?

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One possible answer

For teachers: share after students have reached their own verdict. This is one reading of the evidence.

How far does the novel support the claim? Hardly at all, though Bran has one real card to play.

The geography rules it out as the location. Bram places the castle in “the extreme east of the country” (Chapter 1), reached from Bistritz through the Borgo Pass. Bran stands about 200 km away in the far south, near Brașov, and the novel never names it.

The description does not fit either. Bram’s castle is a ruin: a “vast ruined castle” (Chapter 1) with “broken battlements” (Chapter 1) and a ruined chapel; the Count himself says “the walls of my castle are broken” (Chapter 2). It hangs “on the very edge of a terrible precipice” (Chapter 2), a thousand feet above the forest. Bran is an intact fortress that became a royal home, on a rock above a village and a main road rather than in a remote wilderness.

The Vlad link does not help. Historians doubt that Vlad III ever lived at Bran. Bram’s notes take the name “Dracula” and a little history from William Wilkinson’s An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia (1820). They do not name Vlad, describe impaling or connect the Count with Bran Castle. The novel echoes the historical material when Van Helsing refers to the Voivode who fought the Turks (Chapter 18).

Bran’s real card is that Bram could have seen a picture of it, the “Castle of Terzburg” in Charles Boner’s Transylvania (1865), one of the books he used. A picture of Bran may have coloured his idea of a castle on a crag. But a picture is not a location, and nothing Bram wrote connects the two.

So Bran can fairly claim to look like what most people imagine Castle Dracula to be, an image that owes more to films, and to Bran’s own marketing since Western tour operators adopted it in the 1960s, than to the novel. It cannot claim to be the castle Bram described or placed. Its own website half admits as much when it asks visitors to separate its history from the fictional Count.

What would Bram have made of it? Nobody can know. The following is one possible interpretation, based on his theatrical career and interest in protecting his work; it is not a recorded opinion or the only defensible answer.

- He spent 27 years (1878–1905) as Henry Irving’s manager, most of them at the Lyceum. His experience of audiences, publicity and theatre management offers a basis for imagining that he might have appreciated Bran’s showmanship.
- Bram staged a copyright reading at the Lyceum on 18 May 1897, before the novel’s publication. Florence later pursued the unlicensed film Nosferatu. These actions also offer a basis for imagining reservations about commercial uses of the story, but do not establish what Bram would have thought about Bran.
- Harker cannot find a map showing the castle’s exact location. A tourist attraction at a fixed address creates an interesting contrast with that uncertainty. Bram’s 1897 remark that readers should “find it out for themselves” concerned a possible moral lesson in the novel; it was not an invitation to identify the castle.
- An alternative answer could place more weight on historical accuracy or on the commercial use of fiction. Whichever view students take, distinguish Bram’s documented words and actions from a modern inference.

Sources and further reading: bramstokerestate.com/resources/source-materials#teaching-and-reading. For the novel, maps and location evidence, see bramstokerestate.com/resources/where-was-castle-dracula. The teaching answer is also available at bramstokerestate.com/resources/studying-dracula/in-the-classroom#activity-11-one-possible-answer.

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