

Life in the Iron Age: Discoveries with Ellie

Learning objective: To analyse the changes in daily life, trade, and settlement patterns during the British Iron Age.

Read the questions carefully and use your historical knowledge to answer in full sentences. Ellie the Elephant is looking for your expert insights into how people lived over 2,000 years ago.

During the Iron Age, people in Britain moved from using bronze tools to iron ones. This change allowed for stronger weapons and better farming equipment. Communities often lived in fortified hillforts, which were circular settlements protected by banks and ditches. People traded goods such as salt, wool, and metalwork, and eventually began using coins. Life was centred around the family roundhouse, where the hearth was at the very heart of the home.

Word bank: Hillfort · Roundhouse · Iron · Trade · Currency · Settlement · Agriculture · Smelting

1. Explain why the discovery of iron smelting was a significant turning point for Iron Age farmers compared to those in the Bronze Age. (2 marks)

2. Describe the defensive features of an Iron Age hillfort. Why might a community choose to build their home on high ground? (2 marks)

3. Compare and contrast the structure of a typical Iron Age roundhouse with a modern house. What are the main differences in materials and heating? (2 marks)

4. Justify your answer: Was the introduction of currency (coins) more important for trade than the barter system? Why? (2 marks)

5. What might happen if a hillfort's water supply were cut off during a period of conflict? (2 marks)

Draw: Draw a cross-section of an Iron Age roundhouse. Label the central hearth, the wattle-and-daub walls, and the thatched roof.



Extension challenge: Imagine you are an archaeologist who has just discovered an Iron Age hoard of coins. Write a short journal entry explaining why these coins were buried and what they tell us about the wealth and trade routes of the people who lived there.