

Life in an Iron Age Hillfort

Learning objective: To understand the structure and daily life of communities during the Iron Age in Britain.

Read the passage carefully and answer the questions using evidence from the text.

Ellie the elephant loves exploring the history of ancient Britain. During the Iron Age, which began around 800 BC, people lived in small, tight-knit communities. They often built their homes on high ground, creating impressive hillforts surrounded by deep ditches and high wooden banks. These clever defenses protected their families and their precious livestock from raiders.

Inside the fort, families lived in roundhouses. These were circular buildings made from stone or wood, with walls covered in 'wattle and daub'—a mixture of woven sticks and mud. The roofs were thatched with straw to keep out the damp British weather. Life was busy and focused on survival. Farmers grew crops like wheat and barley, while blacksmiths worked hard to shape iron into strong tools, swords, and jewellery. Unlike today, there were no shops using £ notes or coins for most of the period; instead, people traded goods like grain, wool, or metalwork. Everyone worked together to ensure the community stayed safe and fed throughout the changing seasons.

Word bank: Hillfort · Roundhouse · Iron · Subsistence · Defensive · Wattle and daub

1. Where did Iron Age people usually choose to build their hillforts and why? (2 marks)

2. What materials were used to construct the walls of an Iron Age roundhouse? (2 marks)

3. Why might Iron Age people have felt it was important to live in a tight-knit community? (2 marks)

4. Based on the text, how did Iron Age people obtain the items they needed without using money? (2 marks)

5. Do you think life in an Iron Age hillfort was difficult? Explain your answer using evidence from the text. (3 marks)

Draw: Draw a cross-section of an Iron Age roundhouse, showing the wattle and daub walls, the thatched roof, and a small fire burning in the center.

Extension challenge: Research how 'wattle and daub' is made and write a short, step-by-step guide on how an Iron Age builder might have prepared the mixture.