

Life in the Iron Age: Ellie's Historical Discovery

Learning objective: To analyse the lifestyle, settlement patterns, and technological advancements of Iron Age Britain.

Read the text carefully and answer the questions below. Use full sentences and refer back to the text to support your ideas.

Ellie the elephant, our keen historian, has been uncovering the secrets of the Iron Age in Britain, which began around 800 BC. Unlike the earlier Bronze Age, people discovered how to smelt iron ore to create stronger tools, weapons, and ploughshares. This technological leap revolutionised farming, allowing tribes to clear dense woodlands and cultivate more fertile land. Communities often lived in sturdy, circular dwellings known as roundhouses, constructed from timber, wattle, and daub, with thatched roofs. As competition for resources grew, many people moved to hilltop settlements. These impressive hillforts, protected by massive earthworks and deep ditches, were designed to provide safety and demonstrate the power of local chieftains. Iron Age society was organised into complex tribes led by powerful warriors. They were not just fighters; they were skilled artisans who traded goods like salt, pottery, and decorative jewellery across Britain and even into Europe. Ellie notes that these people were far more sophisticated than many realise, possessing a deep connection to the landscape and a highly organised social structure that shaped the future of our nation.

Word bank: Hillfort · Iron · Settlement · Tribes · Advancement · Roundhouse · Smelting · Fortification

1. Identify two materials used to construct the roundhouses mentioned in the text. (2 marks)

2. According to the text, what was the primary purpose of constructing hillforts? (2 marks)

3. Explain why the discovery of iron smelting was considered a 'technological leap' for Iron Age farmers. (3 marks)

4. What might happen to a tribe's social status if they did not possess strong iron tools or weapons? Justify your answer. (3 marks)

5. Do you think Iron Age people were more concerned with survival or trade? Justify your choice using evidence from the passage. (3 marks)

Draw: Draw a cross-section of an Iron Age hillfort. Include the roundhouses inside the perimeter, the protective ditches, and the earthwork banks.



Extension challenge: Compare and contrast the lifestyle of an Iron Age tribe member with a person living in the modern UK. Create a table of differences regarding their housing, tools, and community safety. Then, write a short paragraph explaining which aspect of Iron Age life you find most fascinating and why.