

Life in the Iron Age: Settlements and Survival

Learning objective: To analyse the structure of Iron Age hillforts and understand how advancements in technology, such as iron smelting, transformed daily life in Britain.

Read each question carefully and use your historical knowledge of the Iron Age to provide detailed, evidence-based responses. Ensure you use technical vocabulary where appropriate.

Ellie the elephant has been digging deep into the archives to learn about how people lived in Britain between 800 BC and the Roman invasion. Unlike the Bronze Age, the Iron Age saw the development of stronger tools and the construction of massive hilltop settlements.

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

1. Explain why Iron Age people chose to build their settlements, known as hillforts, on high ground rather than in the valleys. (2 marks)

2. Compare and contrast the construction of a typical Iron Age roundhouse with a modern-day house. What materials were used for the walls and roof? (3 marks)

3. Justify your answer: Why was the discovery of iron smelting considered a 'technological revolution' compared to the previous use of bronze? (3 marks)

4. If you were an Iron Age farmer, what might happen to your community's food supply during a particularly harsh winter? How would you adapt? (2 marks)

5. Describe the social structure of an Iron Age tribe. Who held the power, and how do we know this from archaeological evidence? (3 marks)

Draw: Draw a cross-section of an Iron Age hillfort. Include the defensive ramparts (earth banks), a central roundhouse, and a small area for livestock. Label the materials used to build the roundhouse.



Extension challenge: Imagine you are an archaeologist who has just discovered an Iron Age hoard containing tools, jewellery, and coins. Write a short diary entry explaining what these items tell us about the trade links and artistic skills of the people who lived there.