Life in an Iron Age Hillfort

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

Read the text carefully and answer the questions below in full sentences.

Ellie the elephant has been traveling through time to explore the Iron Age, a period in Britain starting around 800 BC. Unlike the Bronze Age, people now used iron to create stronger tools and weapons. Most people lived in bustling hillforts, which were settlements built on high ground, protected by large earth ramparts and deep ditches. These defenses helped tribes keep their homes and grain stores safe from rival groups.

Inside the fort, families lived in roundhouses. These were circular buildings with thick walls made from 'wattle and daub'—a mixture of woven sticks, mud, and straw—and topped with a heavy thatched roof. Life was centred around a central hearth, which provided warmth and a place to cook stews. Farming was the backbone of society; families grew crops like wheat and barley and kept animals such as sheep and cattle. Iron was precious, used to make sturdy ploughs that helped farmers produce more food. During the evenings, people would gather to share stories and songs, creating a strong sense of community before the Roman invasion changed their way of life forever.

Word bank: hillfort · roundhouse · wattle and daub · tribes · ironwork · subsistence

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

2. Why were hillforts built on high ground with deep ditches? (2 marks)

3. Based on the text, why was the invention of iron tools considered a significant advancement for farmers? (2 marks)

4. What does the text suggest about the importance of community during the Iron Age? (2 marks)

5. Do you think living in an Iron Age hillfort would have been challenging? Give one reason for your answer. (2 marks)

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

Extension challenge: Research one piece of Iron Age jewellery or art, such as a torc, and write a short paragraph explaining how it was made and who might have worn it.