

The Iron Age

The Iron Age is the period of history beginning around 800 BC and lasting until the Romans arrived in Britain. It was a time when iron was first used to make tools and weapons, rather than bronze or stone ones. The Iron Age people were called Celts and were made up of many different tribes.

Farming and Food

Iron Age people were farmers. Evidence suggests that technology was used by lots of people during this time. For example, the new metal plough meant that people could work the land quicker and grow more crops. This was a time when new crops started being farmed due to technology being invented. Archaeologists know that wheat, barley, peas, flax and beans were grown and that Iron Age people kept cattle, sheep and pigs. The meat from the animals was preserved (kept for a long time) using salt, which dried it out.



Homes

This was a time when people usually lived in tribes (groups with a leader). These groups lived on farms, in villages or in bigger groups. Some people settled in hillforts or oppida.

Hillforts were areas of land surrounded by mile long ditches, leading to one entrance. In the past, historians described these as a type of early castle. However, although some hillforts were designed for defence against enemies, most were intended to protect areas of farming, so that people or animals would not disturb them. It also appears that some forts were made for storing food or buying and selling goods.

'Oppida' was the name for places where goods (clothes, food, weapons...) were made, stored and sold. Oppida seem like a type of tribal town or kingdom. Sometimes Roman soldiers stayed in these Iron Age 'towns', using them as places to buy more supplies. They were places that had their own councils or governments, where important decisions were made.

Iron Age houses were made out of natural materials. They were circular, now called 'roundhouses', with a central pole and roof rafters to hold the weight of the roof. The walls were plastered with a mixture of clay, cow dung, straw and water.

Questions

1. When did the Iron Age begin?

2. Why is it called the Iron Age?

3. Who were the Celts?

4. Why were Iron Age people better at farming than other people before them?

5. What did Iron Age people eat?

6. People usually lived in groups during the Iron Age. Why is this a better way to live?

7. What were hillforts?

8. There is no evidence that Iron Age people made their homes out of iron. Why do you think this is?

Answers

1. When did the Iron Age begin?
The Iron Age began around 800BC.
2. Why is it called the Iron Age?
It is called the Iron age because it was the time when iron was first used to make tools and weapons rather than bronze/stone ones.
3. Who were the Celts?
The Celts were the Iron Age people and were made up of many different tribes.
4. Why were Iron Age people better at farming than other people before them?
Iron Age people were better at farming than others before them because they invented new technology which meant they could grow new crops.
5. What did Iron Age people eat?
Iron Age people ate crops like wheat, barley, peas, flax, beans. They also ate meat like cattle, sheep and pigs.
6. People usually lived in groups during the Iron Age. Why is this a better way to live?
Children to provide own answers about why it is good to live in a group e.g. for protection, for company, to use a variety of skills.
7. What were hillforts?
Hillforts were areas of land surrounded by mile long ditches, leading to one entrance.
8. There is no evidence that Iron Age people made their homes out of iron. Why do you think this is?
There is no evidence that Iron Age houses were made out of iron. This suggests that they were made from natural materials which have rotten over time.
9. What religious sacrifices did the people make?
Sacrifices of animals and humans were made in the Iron Age.
10. What effect did iron have on the Iron Age soldiers?
Iron was stronger than bronze so soldiers wearing iron armour and using weapons made from iron often won their battles.
11. What do you think are the advantages of living in the Iron Age?
Children to provide own answers about why it would have been good to live in the Iron age e.g. a time of inventions with new technology and iron for soldiers.