

Introduction to the Iron Age



Aim

- To find out about the Iron Age.

Success Criteria

- I can identify key dates in the Iron Age era.
- I can explain who used iron during this time.
- I can explain why iron was used.
- I can give examples of artefacts made from iron.

Prehistoric Times

There is a large period of time for which we have no written records and we call this 'prehistory'. Starting from evidence of the first early humans, it is split into three sections:

The Stone Age

800 000 BC



The Bronze Age

2100 BC



The Iron Age

750 BC



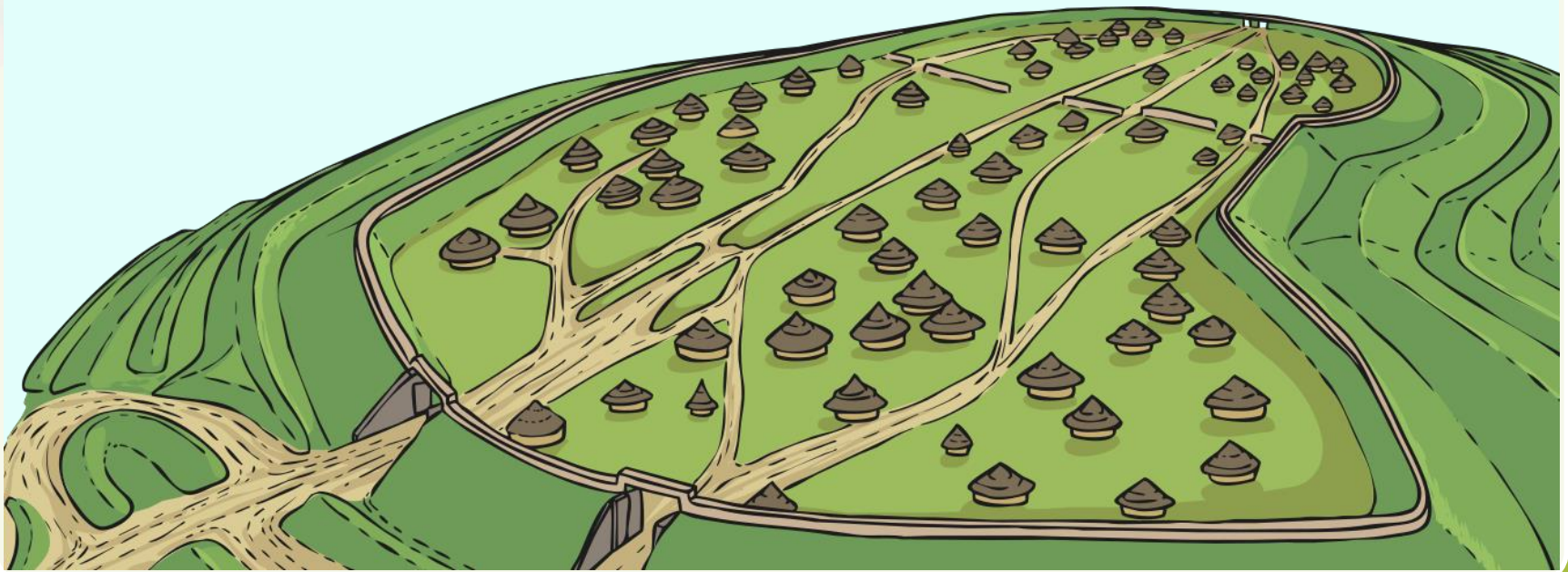
There is no recorded history of this time that we can read, just clues left behind which archaeologists have to try and interpret.

The Iron Age in Britain lasted for around 800 years.

When Was the Iron Age?

The Iron Age in Britain continued until the Roman invasion of AD 43. This period of time followed the Bronze Age, and by 500 BC, iron had replaced bronze as the chosen metal for making weapons and tools.

Although the Iron Age didn't properly begin in Europe until the 8th century BC, the Hittites of Anatolia (part of modern day Turkey) are thought to have used the first iron in the 14th century BC. This was followed by places such as ancient India and ancient Greece in the 12th century BC.



The Celts

The people living in Europe during the Iron Age are known as Celts. This culture continues to live on today within music and language.



During the Iron Age, Celtic people were reported to have worn close-fitting trousers with a long linen or woollen tunic, which was tied with a belt. Fabrics were dyed different colours, and checked and striped patterns were often used, a little like tartan.

A Celtic warrior would usually fight with a long sword or spear and an oval shield.



Where Does Iron Come From?

Iron ores are minerals and rocks from which iron can be extracted. Back in the Iron Age, iron was extracted by a process known as 'smelting' using a charcoal-fired furnace. The iron ore and charcoal were put into the hot furnace, which melted off the waste material in the rock, leaving the iron behind as a big lump known as a 'bloom'. The iron could then be heated and hammered into shape.



Why Iron?

Iron is tougher than bronze. It is shaped by being heated to a high temperature and then hammering it against an anvil. This process is known as 'smithing'.

The photo on the right shows a blacksmith hard at work.

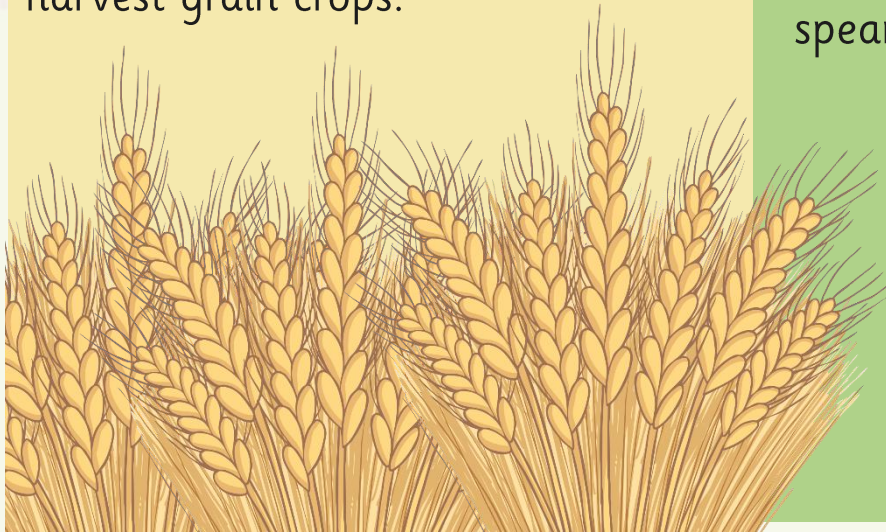


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Why Iron?

Compared to bronze, iron was considered easier to work with. It could be shaped into finer and sharper objects like spear heads, arrow heads, daggers and swords.

Other sharp objects, such as a sickle hook, were used in farming to harvest grain crops.



spear head



arrow head



dagger



sword

Artefacts

One of the earliest Iron Age hoards was discovered in Wales, which included an iron sickle and sword. Also discovered was a bronze cauldron found at the bottom of a lake, possibly put there as a religious offering to the gods.

In the Iron Age, cauldrons were most likely used for cooking.

These finds are dated to the beginning of the Iron Age and show the crossover from the Bronze Age entering into the Iron Age.



More Artefacts



A hoard of Iron Age coins found in Suffolk in 2008.



Iron Age comb found in 2006 in Warwickshire.

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Hillforts

The first hillforts were constructed from around 800 BC. These were defended settlements that made use of natural rises in the landscape for defensive advantage. Between 500 and 100 BC, many parts of Britain were dominated by hillforts with settlements providing homes to hundreds of people.

One of the biggest hillforts in Europe was discovered in Maiden Castle in Dorset.



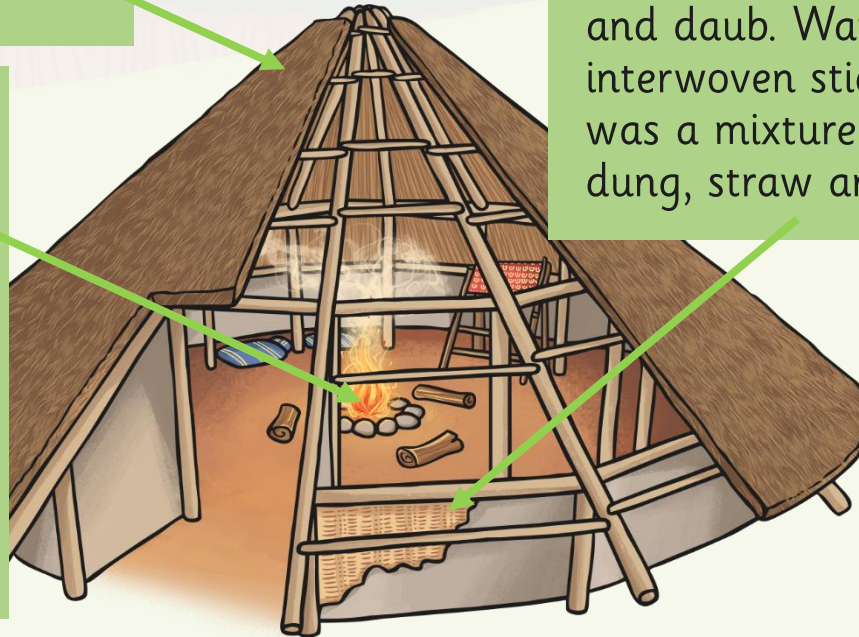
Homes

Archaeologists have discovered that roundhouses were typical Iron Age homes. Some were very large and housed many people.

Roundhouses didn't have chimneys, as the smoke dispersed through the thatched roof.

In the centre of the house there would have been a fire used for cooking, and as a source of heat and light. Some roundhouses may have contained ovens for baking bread.

The frame was constructed out of large timbers and the walls were made from wattle and daub. Wattle was interwoven sticks and daub was a mixture of animal dung, straw and clay.

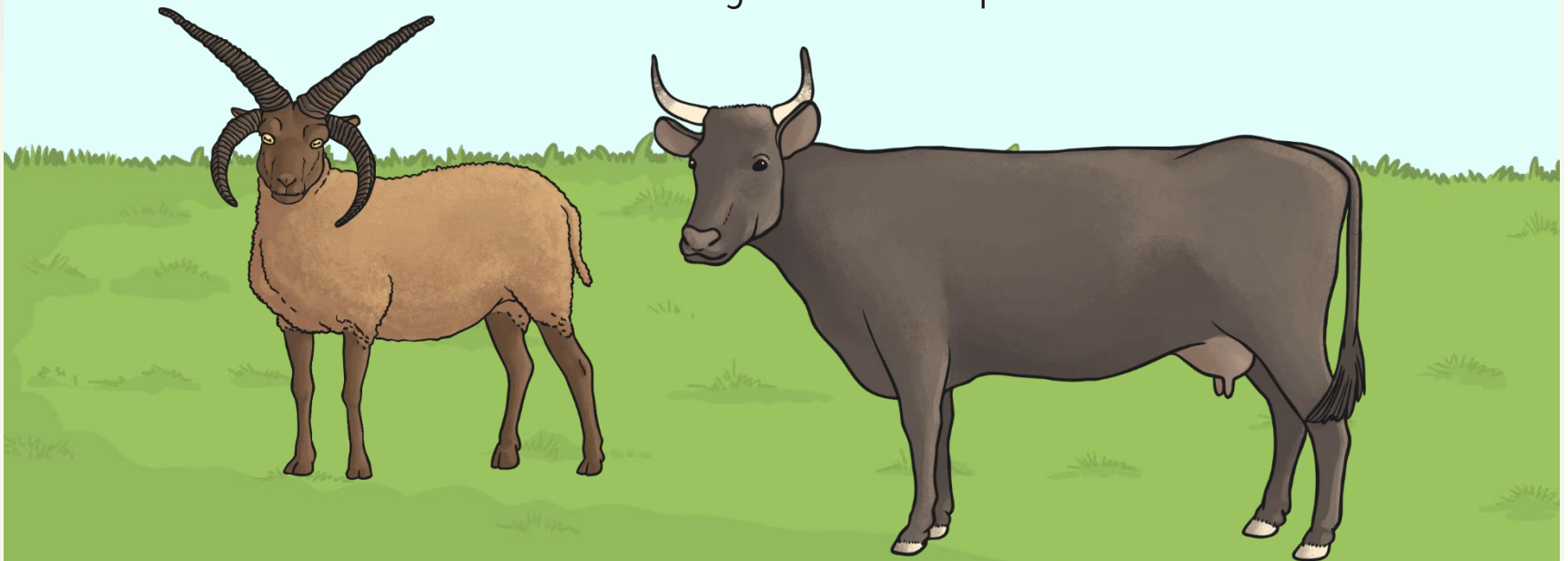


Farming and Agriculture

Britain mostly consisted of settled farming communities during the Iron Age, meaning nearly everyone lived on a farm! Land was used for growing crops such as barely, rye and wheat.

Animals were farmed for their meat and to also provide milk. Cows, sheep and pigs were most commonly kept. Wool was used to make blankets and clothing.

The population in the Iron Age was steadily growing, so woodland had to be cleared to grow more crops.



Religion

The Iron Age Celts believed in over four hundred gods and goddesses that they thought lived in the natural world around them, such as in rivers and woodland. People made offerings to the gods to make them happy and in the hope that they would be rewarded in return.

Druids were priests and the religious leaders of the time. They carried out religious rituals and gave advice. They were very powerful and well-respected. Little is known about Druids but we know some facts thanks to the Romans who wrote about them.



Plenary

- Write down three new facts that you have learnt about the Iron Age.
- Why do you think learning about the Iron Age is important?



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