



Cornerstones

Iron Age hill forts

What is a hill fort?

In the Iron Age, most people lived in roundhouses made of wood, stone and clay.

They built their huts in groups called settlements.

Some settlements were built on the top of hills, which are known as hill forts.



Why were they built?

During the Iron Age, people lived closely together in farming communities. The communities owned valuable resources such as animals, weapons and food which they needed to protect from rival tribes who might try to steal them.

Living on top of a hill provided protection for communities. Attackers could be spotted easily before they reached the settlement and it would be tiring to climb the hill during an attack.



What were their features?

Hill forts were often built on a plateau, a flat area on the top of a hill. The flat land made it easy to build houses and the steep sides of the hill offered protection.

Settlers often built hill forts near rivers, cliffs and ditches because they offered protection from invasion. They also dug ditches and put up wooden fences or dry stone walls around the settlements for additional defence.



How do we know?

Although the buildings and fences have perished over time, the outline of many hill fort sites can still be seen.

Today, features such as banks, ditches and post holes are visible at hill fort sites, especially from the air. By studying these features, archaeologists can piece together what the hill forts would have looked like.

