

Wales has some amazing Iron Age hillforts! Over time the clay walls and timber posts of roundhouses have decayed and there is often not much left on top of the ground.

Hillforts: Above and Below



Aerial photograph of a hillfort



Artists impression of a hillfort in the landscape today



Artists impression of a hillfort
© Toby Driver

Settlement types

Lots of different Iron Age settlements can be found in Wales. Most of the remains we can see are in areas that have not been farmed or built on, but some evidence can be seen in other ways like on aerial photographs.

Archaeological information

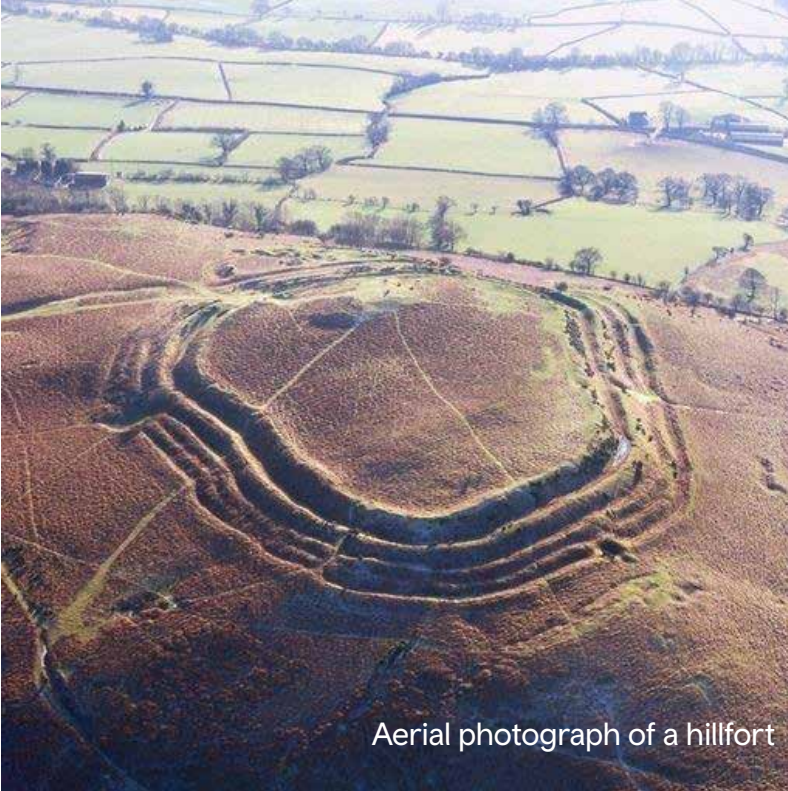
Archaeology is the study of humans in the past by looking at the marks they left behind on the earth. Careful archaeological excavation may show the holes where posts once stood, the burnt earth of a hearth or the clay of a collapsed wall. Layers in the earth may show how a house was built. Layers like the floors of houses and workshops may have objects in them like tools and pottery, which gives information about daily life.

Neolithic

Bronze Age

Iron Age

Romans



Aerial photograph of a hillfort

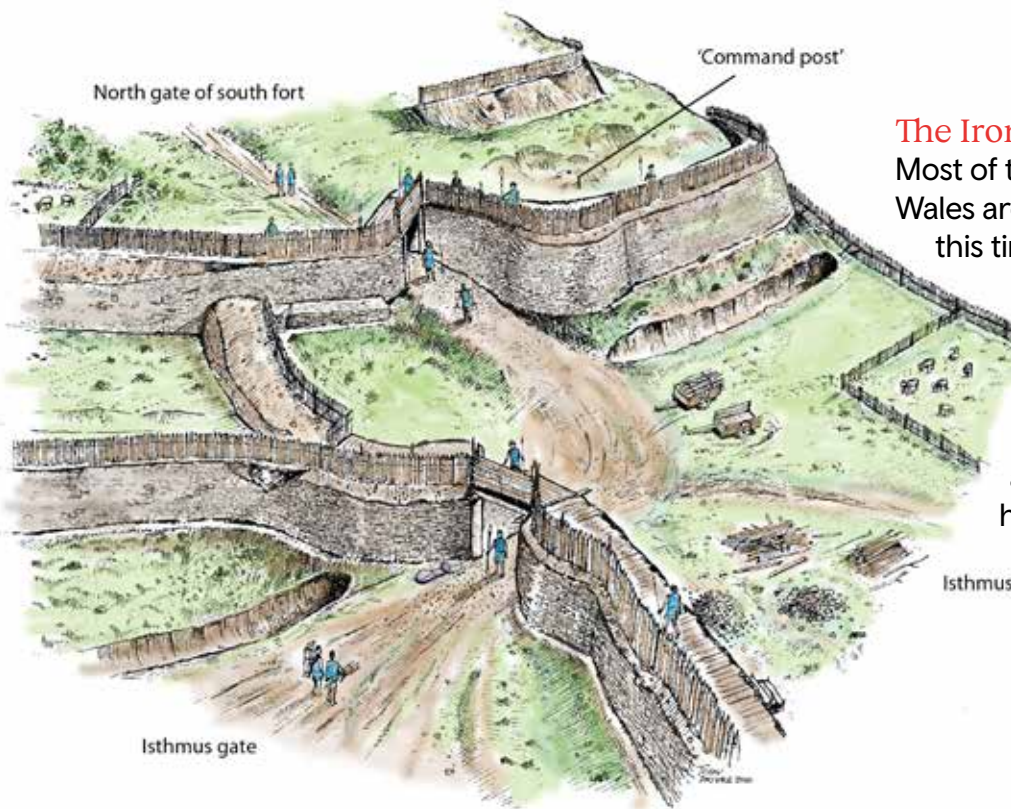


Aerial photograph of soilmarks

Aerial photography

In lowland areas, farming has destroyed the evidence we can see easily. However, the marks of what lies below are visible as cropmarks and soilmarks on aerial photographs. Soilmarks are changes in colour in ploughed fields. Cropmarks are made by differences in how plants grow: crops grow better over pits and ditches because there is deeper soil. Walls and stony areas mean crops wilt or don't grow well because of the shallow soil. Changes in seasons — such as a very dry summer — sometimes mean new sites can be found.

Artist's impression of a hillfort © Toby Driver



The Iron Age in Wales

Most of the hillforts in Wales are Iron Age. At this time the people were concerned with defence which is why there are so many hillforts.

Most of the population were farmers. Cattle and sheep were the main livestock, along with pigs, dogs, small horses and chickens. Barley and wheat were grown, along with other crops. There were also important local warriors who had rich artefacts such as decorated weapons and jewellery.

Wales has some of the most impressive Iron Age hillforts in Britain. The clay walls and timber posts of roundhouses have decayed and there is often little on the surface to show how much lies below.

Hillforts: Above and Below



Aerial photograph of a hillfort



Artists impression of a hillfort in the landscape today



Artists impression of a hillfort
© Toby Driver

Settlement types

A wide variety of Iron Age settlements can be found in Wales. Most of the visible earthwork and stone remains are to be found in areas that have not been farmed or built on, but some evidence also survives elsewhere: the buried archaeology is visible on aerial photographs.

Archaeological information

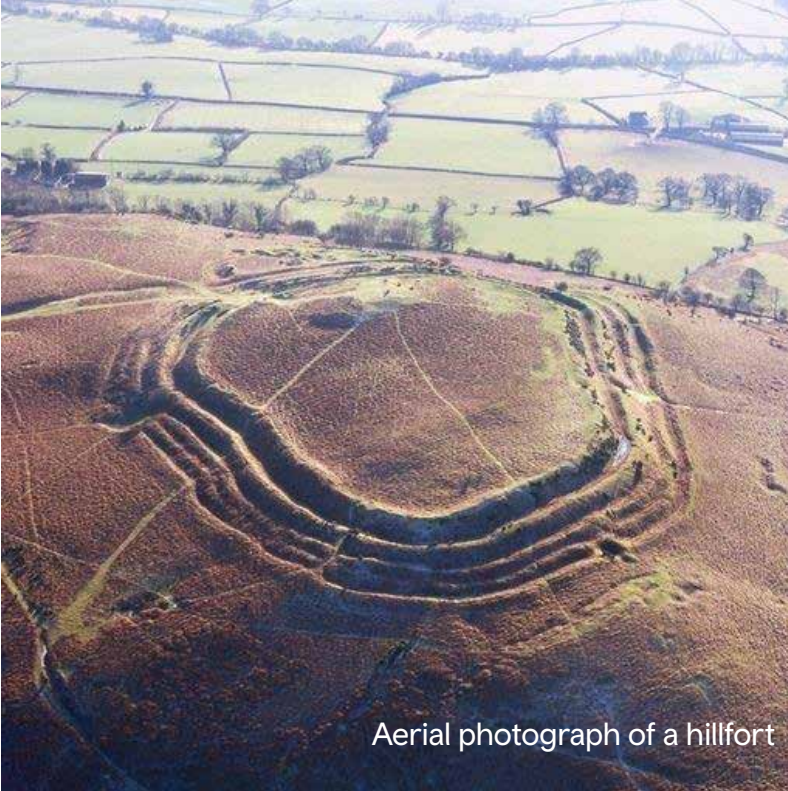
Archaeology is the study of humans in the past through the marks they left behind on the earth. Careful archaeological excavation may show the holes where posts once stood, the burnt earth of a former hearth or the clay of a collapsed wall. Clear layers may show how a house was built, while layers such as the floors of houses and workshops may contain objects like tools and pottery, which provide information about daily life.

Neolithic

Bronze Age

Iron Age

Romans



Aerial photograph of a hillfort

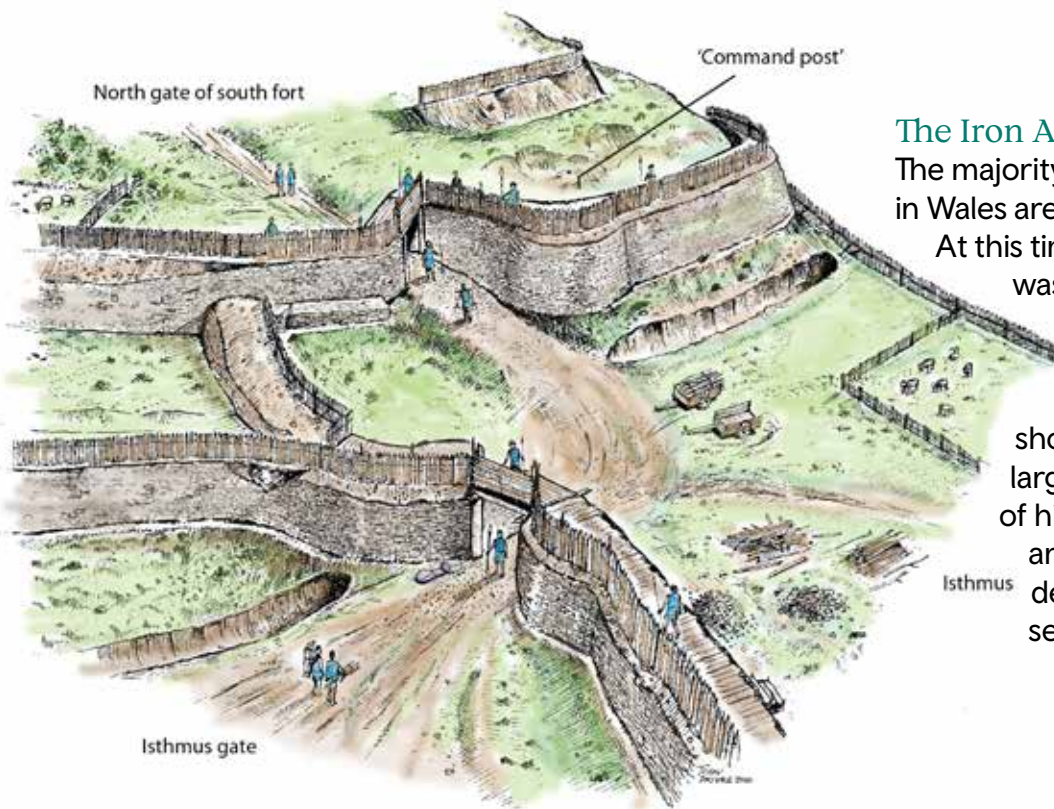


Aerial photograph of soilmarks

Aerial photography

In lowland areas, centuries of ploughing have often resulted in the destruction of the remains of prehistoric forts above ground. However, the marks of what lies below is still visible as cropmarks and soilmarks on aerial photographs. Soilmarks appear as changes in colour within ploughed fields. Cropmarks are formed by differences in crop or grass growth: crops grow better over pits and ditches as a result of deeper soil depth, while walls and stony areas cause crops to wilt or become stunted in the reduced soil depth. Changes in seasons — such as a very dry summer — may make new sites visible.

Artist's impression of a hillfort © Toby Driver



The Iron Age in Wales

The majority of hillforts in Wales are Iron Age.

At this time there was a growing concern with defence, shown by large numbers of hillforts and other defended settlements.

Most of the population were farmers and herdsmen. Cattle and sheep were the main livestock, while pigs, dogs, small horses and domestic fowl were also kept. Barley and wheat were grown, along with other crops such as beans, peas and flax. There is also evidence of important local warriors: rich artefacts such as decorated weapons and jewellery, for example.

Wales boasts some of the most impressive Iron Age hillforts in Britain, as well as smaller defended settlements, farmsteads and groups of roundhouses. The clay walls and timber posts of roundhouses have long since decayed and there is often little on the surface to indicate the extent of the archaeological features below.

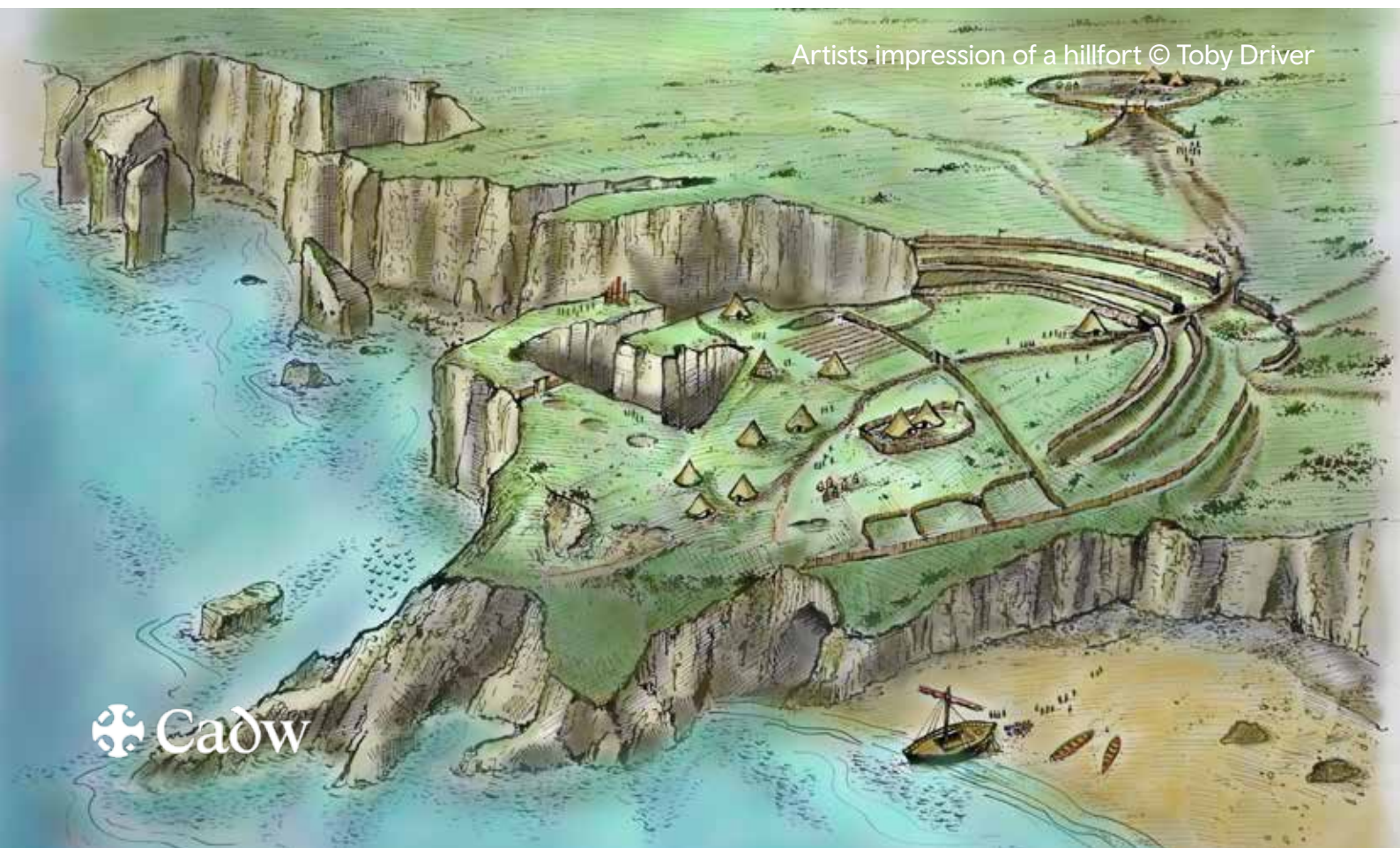
Hillforts: Above and Below



Aerial photograph of a hillfort

The smaller defended enclosures that can be found in Wales were probably farmsteads. They would often have contained timber roundhouses with grain storage pits, working hollows and two- and four-post settings (indicating anything from drying racks to raised granaries). The roundhouses had conical thatched roofs and there were various methods of wall construction, including wattle-and-daub, turf and drystone. Often, however, all that remains (apart from buried archaeological deposits) is a circular drainage ditch or circular house platform. Many of these small defended farmsteads were designed as much to keep the valuable stock animals safe from rustling as to protect the inhabitants. In parts of Wales, particularly Montgomeryshire, Pembrokeshire and Gwynedd, the landscape was almost as densely occupied in the Iron Age by defended farmsteads and hut groups as it is by present-day farms.

Artists impression of a hillfort © Toby Driver



Aerial photography

In lowland areas, centuries of ploughing and field clearance have often resulted in the destruction of the upstanding remains of prehistoric forts and homesteads. Despite this, the buried archaeology contained within ditches, post holes and pit alignments is still visible as cropmarks and soilmarks on aerial photographs. Soilmarks appear as changes in colour within ploughed fields. Cropmarks are formed by differences in crop or grass growth: crops grow better over pits and ditches as a result of deeper soil depth, while walls and stony areas cause crops to wilt or become stunted in the reduced soil depth. Depending upon seasonal conditions — such as a very dry summer — new sites may become visible in areas previously surveyed. Every Scheduled Ancient Monument in Wales is recorded from the air on a regular basis. Its condition is monitored and compared to previous photographs.



Aerial photograph of soilmarks



Aerial photograph of a hillfort

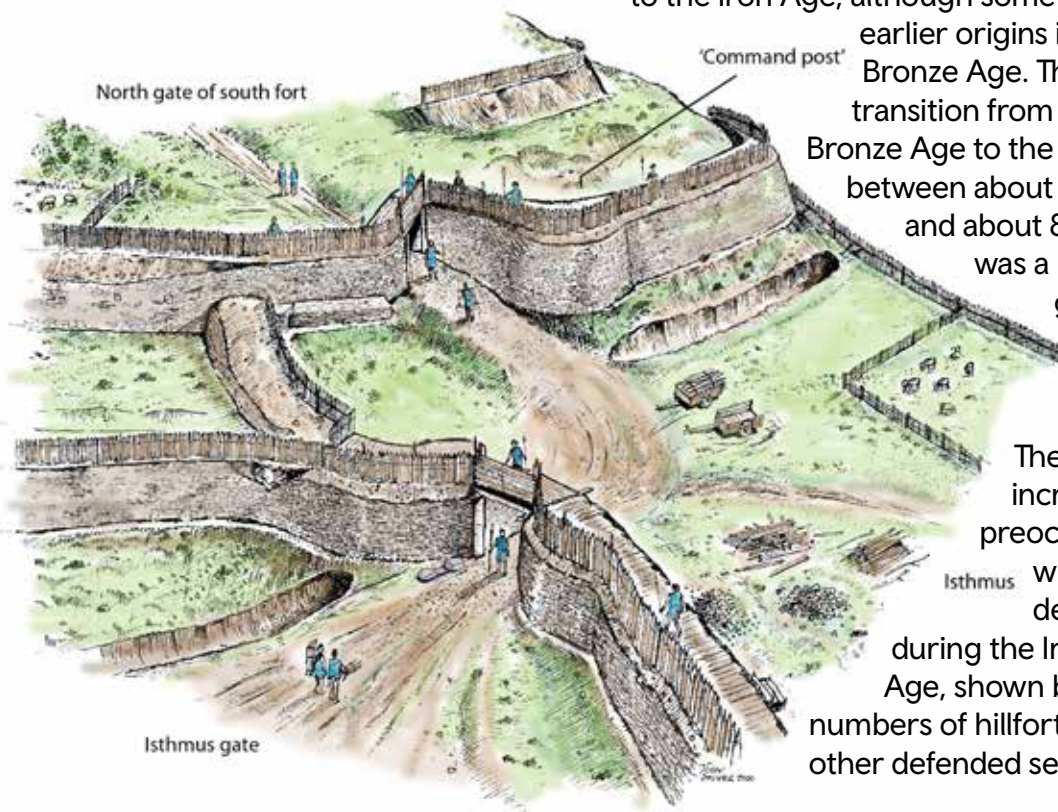
The Iron Age in Wales

The majority of hillforts in Wales date to the Iron Age, although some have earlier origins in the late Bronze Age. The gradual transition from the late Bronze Age to the Iron Age, between about 1200 BC and about 800 BC,

was a period of great social and cultural change.

There was an increasing preoccupation with defence during the Iron Age, shown by large numbers of hillforts and other defended settlements.

Artists impression of a hillfort © Toby Driver



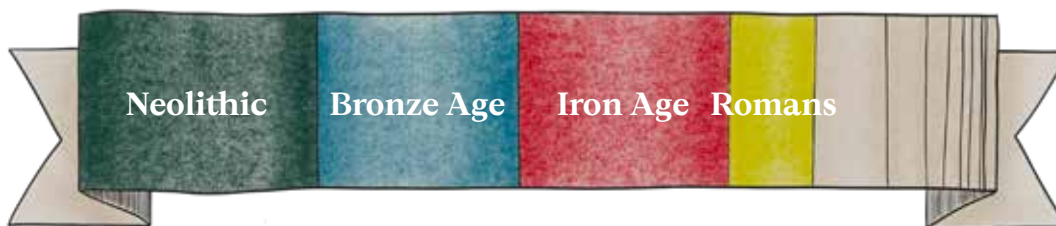
Archaeological information

Archaeology is the study of humans in the past through the physical traces they left behind. Careful archaeological excavation may reveal the holes where posts once stood, the course of an infilled drain, the burnt earth of a former hearth or the clay of a collapsed wall. Distinct layers may show how a house was built, while artefacts lost or discarded by the builders and inhabitants can provide evidence of the date of building or occupation. Layers such as the floors of houses and workshops may contain objects such as tools and pottery, which provide information about daily life. Monuments rarely remained the same from construction to abandonment. Untangling the sequences of damage and repair, or demolition and rebuilding, is critical to our understanding of their history. Hillforts were often built in distinct phases. The structures that may be found within them were not necessarily built at the same time as each other. Like a jigsaw, the larger picture must be built up from the small pieces of evidence that can be revealed by careful excavation. The individual fragments are fragile and easily disturbed, and once lost they are gone forever. Often their location within the archaeological layers is critical, so it is not difficult to see how seemingly harmless activities such as ploughing can cause loss to such faint traces of the past.

Settlement types

A wide variety of Iron Age settlements can be found in Wales, differing in terms of size, construction techniques, setting and function.

Most of the visible earthwork and stone remains are to be found in areas that have not been farmed or built on, but some evidence also survives elsewhere: the buried archaeology is visible on aerial photographs.



Most of the population were farmers and herdsmen, practising a successful mixed subsistence economy. Cattle and sheep were the principal livestock, while pigs, dogs, small horses and domestic fowl were also kept. Barley and wheat were grown, alongside other plant crops such as beans, peas and flax. There is also evidence for local warrior aristocracies: high-status artefacts such as decorated weapons, jewellery and feasting equipment, for example.



Artists impression of a hillfort in the landscape today