

Topic Knowledge Organiser: Prehistoric Britain

Key Questions:

How do we order the periods of prehistoric Britain?

What was life like in Stone Age Britain?

What tools did early Stone Age people use?

What did Stone Age people eat?

How did people communicate?

How did the end of the Ice Age change life in Stone Age Britain?

What were Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age settlements like?

How did life in Britain change from the Stone Age to Iron Age?

What were the main events from Stone Age to Iron Age?

Key Time Periods in Britain

Palaeolithic Stone Age	The early Stone Age: 900,000 years ago - 10,000 BC
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Mesolithic Stone Age	The middle Stone Age: 10,000 - 4,500 BC
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Neolithic Stone age	The new Stone Age: 4,500 - 2,400 BC
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Bronze Age	Bronze is discovered: 2,400-800 BC
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Iron Age	Iron is discovered: 800 BC - 43 AD
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Key Vocabulary

prehistoric	A period of history before written records.
flint	 A hard grey rock used for tools in the Stone Age.
bronze	 A metal made from melting together copper and tin.
iron	 A strong naturally occurring metal.
migration	When people move to live in a different place.
hunter gatherer	A person who moves from place to place in search of food. Surviving by hunting, fishing and collecting berries and seeds.
settlement	A place where people live together in a community.
agriculture	Growing crops and keeping animals for food and materials (farming.)



Stone Age to the Iron Age

15000 - 10000 BC

The Lascaux Caves in France are thought to contain some of the oldest cave paintings. The paintings (and engravings) mainly depict animals but no one is sure of the original purpose behind them. They may have been part of religious rituals, representations of everyday life, used to mark or record the passing of time, some sort of calendar or part of superstitious behaviour relating to hoping for a good hunt.

15000 - 10000 BC

Animal hide is used to make tents. An example from this period has been found in France.



4500 - 3500 BC

People begin to make simple pottery and farming begins to spread.

3000 BC

Construction starts on Stonehenge in Wiltshire. It will take around 1000 years for it to be finished. The purpose of the site is a mystery, however, evidence of cremations seem to indicate that it was used as a burial ground from time to time. It is also thought to be a ceremonial site, where services marked the passing of time, seasons and cycles of life and death. The average weight per stone is 25 tonnes (that is around the weight of 25 elephants!). The stones originated from the Preseli Hills in South West Wales, but historians are yet to agree on how they transported the stones to the site of Stonehenge.



STONE AGE

BRONZE AGE

8200 BC

The last 'land bridge' from Lincolnshire and East Anglia to Holland is taken over by salt marsh and eventually, by 6000 BC, it disappears altogether and is taken over by sea water. This water is a result of the great ice sheets from the last ice age thawing.

4000 - 3000 BC

People start to domesticate and ride horses. Before this, people could only travel by foot.

3500 - 3350 BC

The earliest well-dated image of a wheeled vehicle (a wagon) dates from this period. It was discovered on a clay pot found in Poland.

2500 - 1500 BC

Bronze axes are developed which leads to advances in woodworking techniques.

2800 - 1800 BC

'Bell Beaker Culture' arrives in Britain. Sometimes shortened to 'Beaker Culture' these were a group of immigrants named for their distinctive decorative pottery. The pottery had bands filled with impressions made from a comb or cord.



800 BC

The first hillforts are constructed. Hillforts were defended settlements that made use of natural rises in the landscape for defensive advantages.



330 BC

The first written record of the British Isles by a Greek merchant and explorer. He described the inhabitants as skilled wheat farmers, usually peaceable but formidable in war where they used horse-drawn chariots.

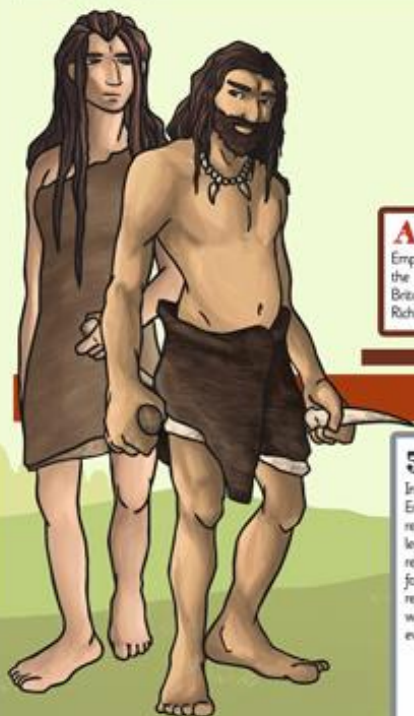
100 BC

Coins are made for the first time. By 20 BC, silver and bronze are being used in the South East of England.



AD 43

Emperor Claudius sends the Roman army to Britain. They land at Richborough, Kent.



54 BC

In 55 BC, Julius Caesar raids South East England on what is thought to be a reconnaissance trip. In 54 BC, he returns with 5 legions (about 25 000 men). War waged until a rebellion in Gaul (a region of Western Europe) forced him to withdraw, never to return. He reported that the Britons dyed their bodies with woad (this gave a bluish colour) and are shaved everywhere except for the upper lip.



200 BC

Earliest known reference to druids. A druid was a member of the priestly people amongst the Celts. Very little is known about them as they left no account of themselves. The only evidence is a few descriptions left by explorers and authors.



700 - 500 BC

Iron working technology becomes widespread through England, Scotland and Wales. A wide range of tools and weapons have been found; many of saws, chisels and other carpentry tools are very similar to the ones we use today!

Small farms and networks of fields start to develop. Evidence has been found of people farming cattle, sheep and pigs as well as the processing of wheat, barley and oats.

1200 - 800 BC

Celtic culture and tribal kingdoms start to emerge and the use of metal work increases. Major innovations were small axes and leaf-shaped blades.



1800 BC

The first large copper mines are dug. Two of the best known are at Mount Gabriel in County Cork and Great Orme, North Wales.



IRON AGE

Useful Links:

- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/z82hsbk>
- <https://apps.museumoflondon.org.uk/interactives/Stone-Age-to-Iron-Age-Explorer/>