



An Archaeological Mystery

Teachers' Information 1

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This pack is designed to put the schoolchildren in the role of archaeologists investigating the excavations of a hillfort. The aim is to provide the different kinds of evidence which archaeologists have access to, in the form of Evidence Sheets. These sheets provide information on individual types of evidence, but when looked at together, it is possible to infer deeper theories about the people who lived on the hilltop in the past.

It is intended that the session will lead to an open discussion of the main questions below, during which all the children can make a contribution, and the conclusions will be the same as those drawn by the actual archaeologists who excavated the hillfort.

The archaeological reports relating to the excavation are available for download from the same website as this teaching pack, and all the evidence that has been used to create this pack has been extracted from the actual excavations which took place.

The key questions which are presented in the children's introductory papers are reproduced below along with the intended outcomes:

What did the hillfort look like?

Most of the information relating to this can be gleaned from the introduction sheet and the excavation sheets. The hillfort defences took the form of a substantial limestone wall and a rock-cut ditch. Part of the hillfort defences had two banks and ditches, with an incomplete main ditch. A key point that it is hoped the children will raise is that the hillfort appears to be unfinished and that therefore it was probably attacked during the construction. This is a wider point which will allow children to debate their own theories as to why people chose to live here and why it was destroyed.

What do you think the hillfort was for?

The substantial defences uncovered in the trenches and the hilltop setting should lead to conclusions that the hillfort was defensive in nature, possibly drawing parallels with castles and the like. However, the amount of skeletons representing women and children and the finds of cooking pots also indicate that a wide variety of people lived in the hillfort and that it cannot be purely seen as a military site.

How old is the hillfort?

Whilst the carbon dates have some margin of error, it is most likely that the hillfort was constructed around 440-390BC and was probably destroyed shortly afterwards.

At the most basic level, the dating sheet cross-referenced with the timeline in the introduction will show that the hillfort dates to the Iron Age. By going deeper into the evidence and cross-referencing various evidence sheets, it is hoped that the children will be able to place certain objects in certain layers and provide date ranges for those objects. By doing this it is possible to suggest approximate dates for construction as well as using the dating on the human remains to determine the destruction of the hillfort.



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Who were the people that lived there? How did they live and what did they eat?

The vast majority of information relating to this will come from the human remains evidence sheet, and also the scientific plants and animal bone evidence. It is also possible for children to make deeper inferences about the people who lived here based on other evidence (e.g. the hillfort was a defensive structure therefore there must have been warriors who lived there).

When did people stop living in the hillfort and why?

The main evidence for this will come from the human remains evidence sheet and also the evidence from the excavations sheets which shows the destruction of the hillfort in the section drawing and photographs. The evidence from the skeletal remains and the fact that the hillfort appears to be unfinished suggests a brutal attack and sudden end. It is possible here for the children to put forward theories of their own based upon any of the evidence in the sheets.

Were the people who lived in the hillfort the only people who have used this hilltop in the past?

This relates to the Mesolithic stone tools which are dealt with on the Finds Evidence Sheets and is an opportunity to discuss the vast time gap between these people and the Iron Age inhabitants, which the children can highlight using the timeline in the introductory sheets. Who were the people that lived there? How did they live and what did they eat? The Mesolithic people were 'hunter-gatherers' and did not farm or live in permanent houses. They came to Fin Cop to quarry the natural chert for their tools.

Above all it is hoped that this lesson pack, and the information within, serves as an introduction to a period of the past which is little known, and also to the ways that archaeological evidence can bring together different themes and help engage schoolchildren with their history.

