

Julius Caesar's Description of Britain

The interior portion of Britain is inhabited by those who were born in the island itself: the parts next to the sea is made up of people from France who have travelled there to make war and to get plunder. After making war against the Britons, they stayed there and began to farm the lands. The number of the people is countless, and their buildings very numerous, for the most part very like those of the French: the number of cattle is great. They use either brass or iron rings, determined at a certain weight, as their money.

Tin is produced in the midland regions near the sea, iron; but the quantity of it is small: they use brass, which is imported.

There, as in France, is timber of every description, except beech and fir. They do not regard it lawful to eat the hare, and the cockerel, and the goose; they, however, breed them for amusement and pleasure. The climate is more temperate than in France, the colds being less severe.

The island is triangular in its form, and one of its sides is opposite to France. One angle of this side, which is in Kent, whither almost all ships from France are directed, [looks] to the east; the lower looks to the south. This side extends about 500 miles. Another side lies toward Spain and the west, on which part is Ireland. Many smaller islands besides are supposed to lie [there], of which islands some have written that at midwinter it is night there for thirty consecutive days. The length of this side, as their account states, is 700 miles. The third side is toward the north, to which portion of the island no land is opposite; but an angle of that side looks principally toward Germany. This side is considered to be 800 miles in length.

The most civilized of all these nations are they who inhabit Kent, which is entirely a seaside district, nor do they differ much from the French customs. Most of the inland inhabitants do not sow corn, but live on milk and meat, and wear skins. All the Britons, indeed, dye themselves with woad, which is a bluish colour, and as a result have a more terrible appearance in fight. They wear their hair long, and have every part of their body shaved except their head and upper lip.

What did Julius Caesar know about Britain before he invaded?

What facts would have made him want to invade Britain?

What might have made Caesar hesitate about invading Britain?

Draw a picture of an Ancient Briton as Caesar might have imagined him.