

Junior Paleontologists Journal – Week 11



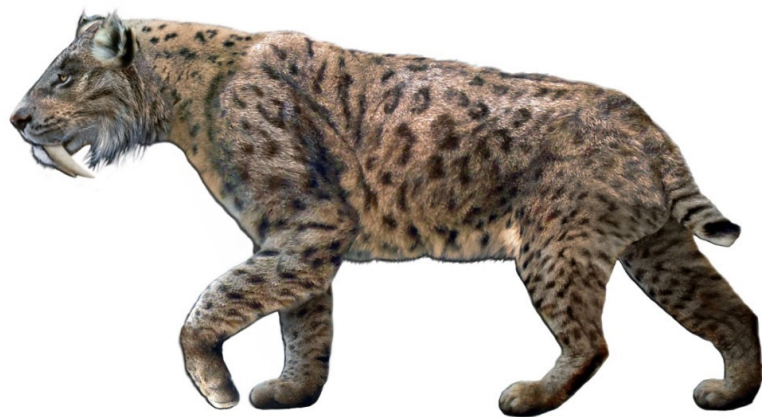
Welcome back Junior Paleontologists!

The Ice Age Saber Tooth Cat

Bears, dogs, and large cats were the main big predators in the Ice Age. The strangest is the Ice Age saber tooth cat. We know these fearsome meat-eaters best from a site in southern California called the La Brea Tar Pits. Over many years, hundreds of individuals became trapped in natural tar, attempting to prey on other animals also trapped in the tar. The museum at the Tar Pits has hundreds of skeletons of saber tooth cats and giant wolves called the dire wolf.

Here is what a saber tooth cat from the La Brea Tar Pits looked like from the side. The shape is correct, but the spots and stripes are guesswork.

Notice the huge teeth. This predator was nearly as big as an African lion.



Dantheman9758 at English Wikipedia

Dinosaur Detectives: the only place where we have found lots of saber tooth cats in our area is the La Brea Tar Pits in California. Can you figure out why they are so rare in the fossil record everywhere else?



(Answer on pg. 5)

Let's look at those teeth and the skull. Those two awfully long teeth are incisors, like the big teeth in the front of a cat's mouth.

In these Ice Age cats, the teeth are so big they look like a sword, or a "saber." Can you see how far the jaw opens to give room for biting? Can you open your jaw that far?



Wikipedia



Bone Clone, Wikipedia

This picture also shows the HUGE front teeth and the sharp cutting teeth in the jaws.

Saber Tooth Cats were the enemy of other animals that lived at the same time, like mammoths, mastodons, and the extinct Short Face Bear in this painting.



Leogon-d613fen Wikipedia

Dinosaur Artists: can you paint or draw a saber tooth cat attacking a mammoth? Or can you write a story or poem?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, occupying most of the page below the text. It is intended for a student to draw a scene of a saber-toothed cat attacking a mammoth, or to write a story or poem related to the prompt.

Next Week: A fossil skull of a giant herbivore that was killed by a saber tooth cat from Arizona.

Keep up the good work, all you Junior Paleontologists!

Answer to pg. 2 question: The La Brea Tar Pits were a natural trap, and saber tooth cats were attracted there in hope of an easy meal. Similar traps are rare, and we do not often find fossil bones of these giant cats because even when they were alive, these predators were rare. Today in our area mountain lions and bobcats live in the wilderness, but they are rare. Carnivores are always rare in life, so their fossils are rare too.