

Sabre-toothed Tiger



The sabre-toothed tiger, also known as the Smilodon, lived between 2.5 million and 10,000 years BC in both North and South America. It was named after its extremely long maxillary canines however it was not actually that closely related to tigers. Although it belongs to the cats family the tiger is part of a different subfamily.

The Smilodon was a very large cat with the heaviest specimen possibly reaching 400kg. It had a short tail, powerful legs and a very muscular neck and jaw. Its teeth were approximately 17cm long and were built for stabbing. It seems that its bite would not have been as powerful as that of other cats, in fact only a third as strong as that of a lion. Through studying its skeleton however it would seem that the Smilodon could open its jaws 120 degrees whereas the lion could only manage 65 degrees.

Experts believe this species was probably quite social, living and hunting in packs. Females and males were roughly the same size so pack groups were most likely mixed. During hunting they would wrestle their prey to the ground and then finish the animal off with a deep stabbing bite to the throat, piercing the jugular.

It is not certain how the species became extinct although there are a number of theories. Some think that around 10,000 BC humans became indirectly responsible by hunting the Smilodon's main prey or by infecting them with a virus.

Others believe the extinction was a result of the end of the Ice Age. Shrinking environments and a change to vegetation patterns made it impossible for the species to survive. Unfortunately scientists cannot be sure.