



Locations where fossils have been found

Dinictis

Common Name:
Saber-tooth cat

Classification:
Class: Mammalia
Order: Carnivora
Family: Felidae



Skull of the saber-toothed cat, *Dinictis*. The black arrows point to tooth puncture marks in the skull indicating that another animal killed this cat. The saber teeth were not found. This skull is on exhibit at the North Dakota Heritage Center, Bismarck. [Brule Formation](#). Stark County. Width 174 mm. North Dakota State Fossil Collection ND1.1.

Description:

Dinictis was one of the early saber-toothed cats. Its body was sleek, 3 to 4 feet long, and resembled the modern-day lynx. They lived in North Dakota about 30 million years ago and were much smaller than the huge saber-toothed cat called *Smilodon* that lived during the Ice Age, a few thousand years ago. Like other saber-toothed cats, *Dinictis* upper canine teeth were elongated, serrated, and curved. They were extremely efficient predators, and the teeth were used in a stabbing action into the skin and flesh of the throat and lower neck of its prey. These teeth were also used to slice into muscle after the initial stab of the teeth killed the victim. Their lower jaws were also modified to open to a wide gape and they possessed very strong neck muscles.



The saber tooth cat, *Dinictis*, pursuing the deer-like *Protoceras*. Painting by Charles R. Knight, courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History.