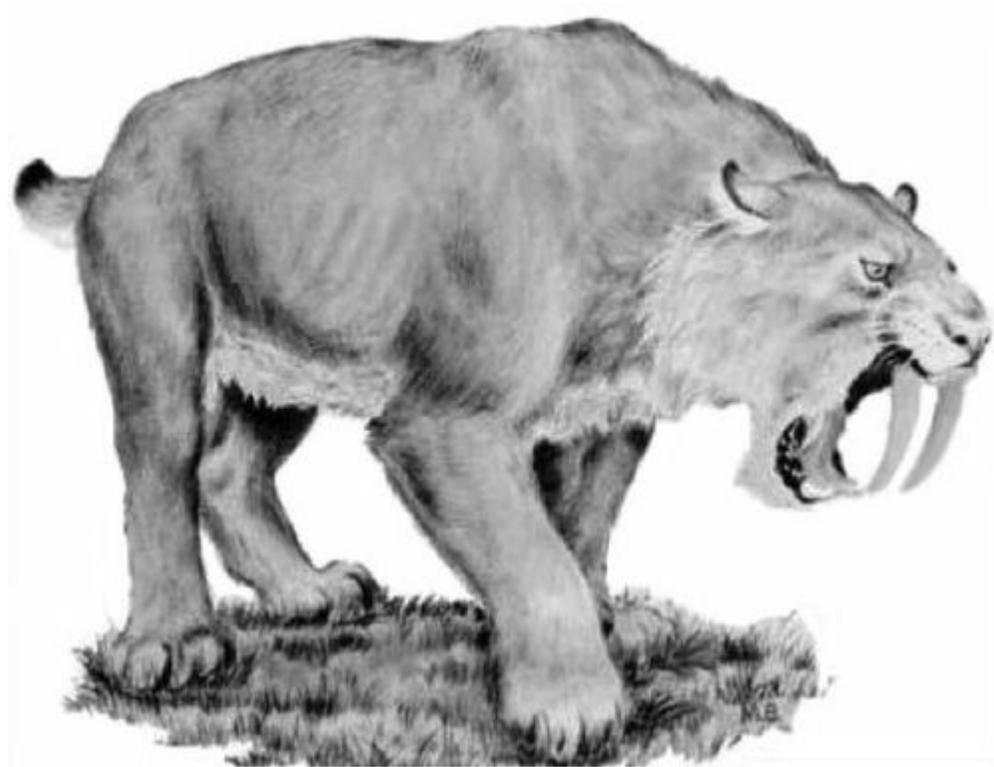


It Would Be Hard to Smile at a Smilodon

by Michael Stahl



Ten thousand years ago, planet Earth was experiencing rapid change, especially in its climate. Over the course of the previous hundred thousand years, a large portion of the globe was covered in glaciers, which are incredibly large sheets of ice that can be the size of continents. This occurred because the earth's temperature was much colder than it is today. However, as the planet began to warm up, the glaciers melted away and could only exist in the parts of the planet that remained cold, like the North and South Poles. Scientists have discovered many fossils from that period, which shows that a large number of species became extinct because they were unable to adapt. In other words, strange looking bones and remains of animals have been found underground. The fact that so many of them are from a similar time in history means that they could not change along with the climate. These fossils make it possible for people today to understand what Earth was like more than ten thousand years ago and perhaps the best examples of this are the found fossils of the Sabre-toothed tiger.

The animal that is most often called a Sabre-toothed tiger is actually called the "*Smilodon*" by scientists. More recent studies show that, though the animal looked a lot like a tiger, it is not a direct ancestor of the planet's tigers of today. So, more and more often, scientists are using the term "cat" to describe it instead of "tiger." The first thing a person would notice looking at the fossils of a *Smilodon* are its teeth. In the front of its mouth, the *Smilodon* had two incredibly large teeth that stretched for twelve inches below its upper lip. The *Smilodon* had developed these teeth, called "canines," for hunting and eating purposes. The *Smilodon* was also covered in fur, which helped it to survive in the very cold northern sections of the earth, as well as the warmer forest areas of what

is now called South America. The fur kept the inside of the *Smilodon's* body the same temperature, no matter what it felt like on the outside.

The *Smilodon* was able to use its large teeth to eat other animals, keeping itself alive. Many times, the *Smilodon* feasted on the meat of something it had hunted, making it a predator and a carnivore. Scientists believe that the *Smilodon* would also have used its canines to eat any animal they happen to find dead in the wilderness, which would also mean it could be called a scavenger. *Smilodon*, like a lot of mammals of its time, had a small brain. It is thought that they might not have traveled in packs nor had a lot of friends. Instead, it is likely that *Smilodons* would frequently fight with each other over animals to eat. And their living prey was probably not very fast or large. The *Smilodon* used to wait for another animal to come close to them without realizing it before they would attack. The *Smilodon* would not run far for prey to eat, many times choosing small, slow, and possibly young ones - the children of other animals!

Scientists feel that there are many possible reasons that led to the extinction of the *Smilodon*, all of which are highly debated. Some think it was due to climate change. As the air began to heat up quickly around planet Earth, animals needed to adapt. Some feel the *Smilodon* failed to do so. When the earth's temperature changed, so did the habitats that animals lived in. Many found cooler areas to travel to or died off. So, the *Smilodon* had a disappearing food supply. The early human beings also began to hunt around this time. Many animals had to become quicker than they were before in order to survive. This included the prey *Smilodon* had fed on for thousands of years. Many of the animals became too quick for the *Smilodon* to capture. Scientists have also discovered that much disease spread throughout the area where the *Smilodon* lived, which also killed off many of the local prey for the *Smilodons*. Finally, it is believed that if any *Smilodons* happened to have their teeth break, they would not have been able to live very long. Their teeth were the single most important things they used for survival. Unfortunately for them, they had weak jawbones because they had to use them so much when feeding. Many died after breaking those jaws.

Though they might not have been very smart or fast, they had those dangerous, long and sharp teeth, and they were probably one of the most feared creatures on the planet when they lived. If a person were to find one today, it would be hard to smile at a *Smilodon*!

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Based on recent studies, Smilodons can be best described as what?

- A. tigers
- B. cats
- C. elephants
- D. lions

2. Smilodons became extinct about 10,000 years ago. What possible cause of this extinction was explained in the passage?

- A. they were hunted by humans
- B. disease that killed the Smilodon
- C. climate change
- D. competition over food from other hunters

3. Read the following sentences from the passage: "And their living prey was probably not very fast or large. The Smilodon used to wait for another animal to come close to them without realizing it before they would attack. The Smilodon would not run far for prey to eat, many times choosing small, slow, and possibly young ones - the children of other animals!"

Based on this information, what can be concluded?

- A. Smilodons didn't have to be sneaky to catch their prey.
- B. Smilodons were not fast hunters.
- C. Smilodons preferred to eat larger animals.
- D. Smilodons had a hard time finding food.

4. Based on the passage, which of the following is true about the Smilodon?

- A. They got along well with other Smilodons.
- B. They were very aggressive animals.
- C. They did not look very threatening.
- D. They were located in one section of the Earth.

5. What is this passage mainly about?

- A. why the Smilodon became extinct
- B. the canine teeth of a Smilodon
- C. an extinct mammal known as the Smilodon
- D. climate change that occurred 10,000 years ago

6. The author ends the passage with the following paragraph: "Though they might not have been very smart or fast, they had those dangerous, long and sharp teeth, which made them one of the most feared creatures on the planet when they lived. If a person were to find one today, it would be hard to smile at a Smilodon!"

Why does the author end the paragraph with that specific sentence?

- A. to inform the reader that Smilodons could be found living on Earth today
- B. to emphasize that Smilodons had canine teeth
- C. to indicate that although Smilodons looked scary, they were probably harmless
- D. to emphasize how scary the Smilodon would be, and to entertain the reader with the word "smile" when talking about a Smilodon

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Smilodons were probably not very fast or large _____ many times they hunted prey that was slow and small.

- A. so
- B. although
- C. but
- D. however

8. How did early humans affect the Smilodon's food supply?

9. Explain how the Smilodon's disappearing food supply may have been a result of climate change.

10. Some of the possible reasons that led to the extinction of the Smilodon affected the Smilodon indirectly. Use evidence from the text to support this statement.
