



Smilodon
The most famous dirk tooth.



Panthera onca augusta
A skull of the extinct northern jaguar from the Pleistocene of Nebraska.



Miracinonyx trumani
The American cheetah.



Homotherium
Scimitar-tooth cat that was contemporary with Smilodon.

Pliocene



Mechanodus
Scimitar-toothed cat.



Pseudaelurus
A genus at the base of the modern cat radiation.



Machairodus
The largest and most specialized dirk tooth.



Eusmilodon
The "big" dirk tooth of the late Oligocene.

The earliest saber-toothed cats belong to a separate family, the Nimravidae; true cats belong to the Felidae. Only rarer cats were found in North America until about 16 million years ago. Many features including sharp teeth and long knife-like canines arose independently in both families.



Dinaelurus
The only known conical-toothed nimravid.



Dinobite
Oligocene "saber tooth" that may have hunted Dinobirds.



Megacynodon
A dirk-toothed contemporary of Dinobite.

There are two basic designs for a saber-toothed cat. Forms with long narrow upper canines are called dirk-toothed cats. Dirk-toothed cats have short legs and small brains. They probably ambushed their prey. The second group has shorter, broad upper canines. These cats had longer legs and larger brains than dirk-toothed cats. They must have been able to pursue prey for short distances as do modern cats. All of the saber-toothed cats are now extinct. Modern cats have round or conical canines.

The first evidence of many modern kinds of animals, including the earliest saber-toothed "cats" and beavers, is in rocks of the early Oligocene (37 million years ago). These animals that are most like them in the modern North American fauna.

Oligocene

37,000,000 years ago

Early Miocene

14,000,000 years ago

Late Miocene

2,000,000 years ago

Pleistocene (Ice age)

Potterterns