SMILODON.FOSSILS.IM

Fate scalpel tooth

Two official measurements, kept apart on purpose.

"The sabertooth cat, or Smilodon fatalis, was named for its nearly foot-long canines." Its scientific name, official wording says, means "fate scalpel tooth," "referring to the elongated blade-like upper canines that could reach 11 inches in length."

The official story	Official wording
Eleven inches	A National Park Service page gives blade-like upper canines of S. fatalis that "could reach 11 inches in length."
28 centimetres	A Natural History Museum page says Smilodon used "large canine teeth, measuring as long as 28 centimetres." That figure is not tied to a named species on the page. This sheet does not treat the two as one measurement.
A body around the teeth	S. fatalis reached "over 3 feet tall at the shoulder, with a body length of nearly 6 feet, and weighing between 350-620 lbs." Official wording also gives robust forearms and "a shortened tail, much like the living bobcat."
A long childhood	Saber-like canines "started to develop around 12 to 19 months in age, and fully formed by 3 years of age, which is a longer growth period compared to modern big cats."

A short quiz

1. What does Smilodon fatalis mean, officially?
2. Which official page gives the 11-inch figure, and for which species?
3. By what age, officially, were the saber-like canines fully formed?

Answers. Fate scalpel tooth. The NPS page, for S. fatalis. By 3 years of age.

Wording from the U.S. National Park Service, "The Big Cats," Tule Springs Fossil Beds, last updated 12 October 2021, and the Natural History Museum, "One of the earliest sabre-toothed mammals discovered in the USA," by James Ashworth, 15 March 2022. Checked 18 November 2026. smilodon.fossils.im is independent of both. Typographic sheet: no photographs inside.