SMILODON.FOSSILS.IM

Was it a tiger?

A popular name, and official wording that says otherwise.

A U.S. National Park Service page is careful about a name almost everyone has heard. “Though sometimes called a “saber-toothed tiger”, Smilodon is not directly related to tigers or other pantherine cats such as lions, leopards, and jaguars.”

The official story	Official wording
A popular name	It is “sometimes called a “saber-toothed tiger”.” Official NPS wording then refuses a direct relationship to tigers, lions, leopards and jaguars.
Its branch	“Smilodon was one of the last of the machairodonts, or Machairodontinae, an extinct branch of the cat family tree that evolved elongated saber-like upper canine teeth.”
Living cats	“The other major branch of cats, called the Felinae, include all living cats we see today.”
A famous form	A Natural History Museum page says sabre-tooth animals “are not a single closely related group of animals.” Smilodon “is perhaps the most famous sabre-tooth of them all.”

A short quiz

1. Does official NPS wording treat Smilodon as a living tiger?
2. Which official branch includes all living cats we see today?
3. Are all sabre-tooths one closely related group, officially?

Answers. No — it is not directly related to tigers or other pantherine cats. The Felinae. No — official wording says they are not a single closely related group.

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.