

Sabre-Tooth Cat Fossils Found in Venezuela

The 1.8-million-year-old fossils include skulls and jawbones of six scimitar-toothed cats.

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Venezuelan oil workers recently uncovered an ancient tar pit containing a palaeontologist's dream: fossils that show what the environment may have been like when North and South America became reconnected. The fossils include those of a type of sabre-toothed cat never before found in South America, The Press Association reports.

A team of researchers led by Venezuelan palaeontologist Ascanio Rincon said the fossils are 1.8 million years old, and include the skulls and jawbones of six scimitar-toothed cats. This variety of sabre-toothed cat had shorter, narrower canine teeth than other species.

"The find is one of the most spectacular and scientifically interesting discoveries of the last decade," said Larry Martin, a professor at the University of Kansas who is an expert on sabre-toothed cats. "The genus hadn't been known from South America before."

The tar pits, discovered by the state oil company in 2006 and excavated by Rincon's team in 2007, reside near the surface of the soil in the eastern state of Monagas. The pits are larger than two football fields.