

Smilodon had weak jaw

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The ancient saber-toothed cat had some pretty scary dentures, but when it came down to actually biting, well, it was no lion.

In fact, a study of the cat's jaw indicated it has only about one-third the biting power of a modern lion, according to a study in Tuesday's edition of Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Researchers led by Colin R. McHenry at the University of Newcastle in Australia used computer modeling to calculate the bite force of the cat, *Smilodon fatalis*.

"For all its reputation, *Smilodon* had a wimpy bite" co-author Stephen Wroe said in a statement.

That doesn't mean the saber-toothed cat wasn't a good hunter, though.

"*Smilodon* was an awesome beast -- and what it lacked in bite force it more than made up for elsewhere," Wroe said.

"The sabercat had an immensely powerful body, perfect for wrestling large prey to the ground, and our models show that it needed to do this before trying a bite," McHenry said.

"Killing was more likely applied to the prey's throat, because it is easier to restrain the prey this way. Once the bite was done the prey would have died almost instantly."