

'Sabre-toothed tiger' skeleton sells for more than \$84,000

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The remains were discovered on a South Dakota ranch in 2019

A nearly 40-million-year-old skeleton belonging to what is popularly called a sabre-toothed tiger has sold for \$84,350, a year after its discovery on a US ranch.

The skeleton, about 120 centimetres (nearly four feet) long, was snapped up by a private collector in just one minute at an auction in Geneva on Tuesday.

The original bones are those of a *Hoplophoneus*—not technically cats, they are an extinct genus of the *Nimravidae* family and once stalked the plains of North America.

Such extinct predatory mammals are commonly known as sabre-toothed tigers.

Also on sale was a *Tyrannosaurus Rex* tooth which fetched just over \$6,000, while a 85-cm long fin from a mosasaur—a marine reptile that in the Cretaceous period was at the top of the submarine food chain—was bought for almost \$8,000.

A 75-million-year-old ammolite—an opal-like organic gemstone in shades of red and orange—measuring 40 cm long by 36 cm wide remained unsold because the reserve price was not met.

Debate rages as to the right balance between the scientific value of such items and their worth on the open market.

Some palaeontologists insist animal or plant fossils are not decorative objects for collectors, but witness to the evolution of life on Earth and therefore scientific articles that ought to be studied and then shared with the public in museums.



The find was part of a larger collection being auctioned in Geneva

Before the sale, Swiss collector Yann Cuenin told AFP: "If we're talking about the sabre-toothed tiger, for example, it's not a skeleton which is of major scientific interest, in the sense that it's something which is already known to science.

"I am all for museums, but I am also in favour of objects living among us; for there to be collectors, for pieces to be bought and sold—that's what brings culture to life."

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