PALEONTOLOGY

Cat-fight 50,000,000 Years Ago Left Sabre-Tooth Scar

A CAT-FIGHT occupied the attention of the American Philosophical Society at its meeting in Philadelphia.

The fight came off 50,000,000 years ago, more or less, but its outcome still has plenty of interest about it.

Scientists crowded round, when Drs. W. B. Scott and G. L. Jepsen of Princeton University exhibited the skull of a cat-like animal with a gaping but partly healed wound in it, that had undoubtedly been inflicted by one of the terrible weapons of a giant sabre-tooth cat that roamed the West when the West was really wild. Dr. Scott said:

"This has to do with the skull of the cat-like Nimravus, which was discovered by the Museum of the State School of Mines at Rapid City, South Dakota, and was sent in for inclusion in this report.

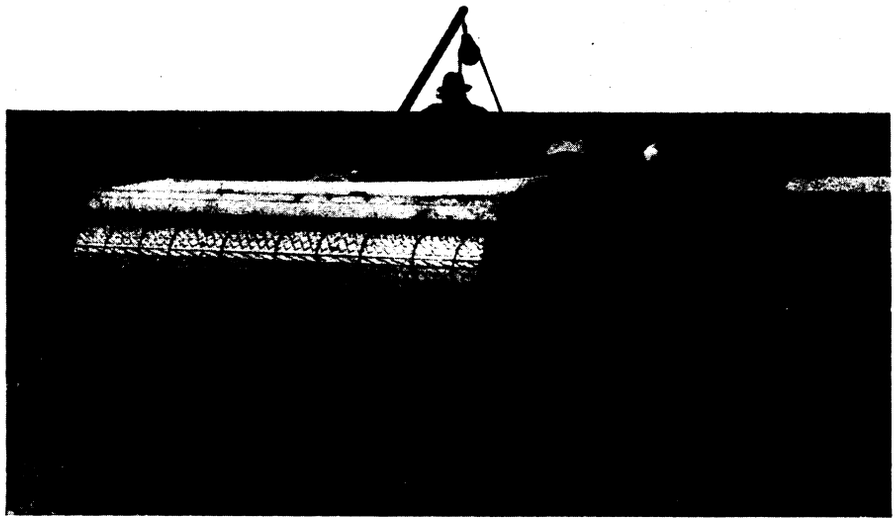
"The skull, which is that of a rather small animal, considerably smaller than a puma but somewhat larger than a lynx, shows a terrible wound through the forehead. This wound was inflicted in the lifetime of the animal, as is shown by the deposits of secondary bone around the edges of the gap. No doubt externally the wound was completely healed before death.

"The great interest of this remarkable specimen is the confirmation it gives to the interpretation of the sabre-toothed cats which had been reached by most students of the problem, as to the manner in which the great sabres could have been used. The whole structure of the skull shows that the lower jaw could be dropped to an extraordinary degree and the mouth opened so widely as to admit the points of the great sabres.

"The sabre-toothed cat would then strike with the head a stabbing blow, in just the same way that a venomous snake strikes. That is the only possible explanation of the manner in which the great tusks were used; and yet it is so completely unlike anything among existing mammals that many have received it with skepticism.

"The wound in the skull in question was clearly made by the sabre of the great contemporary sabre-toothed cat, Eusmilus, and was obviously made as an incised or punctured wound, not by a sharp point drawn across the skull. The sabres of Eusmilus fit this wound, and thus afford a most interesting confirmation of a theoretical deduction."

Science News Letter, May 2, 1936

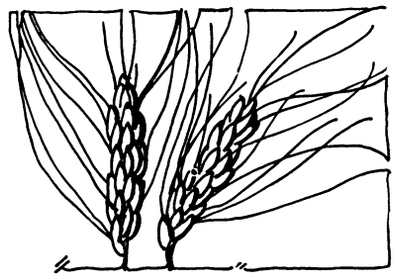


REAPING A HARVEST NO MAN HAD SOWN

Among the devices used to obtain seed of native grasses for the re-sodding of lands in the West plowed into wheatfields during the tragic mistaken years of "normalcy" before the Depression and the Drought, was this strange device mounted on the back of an old Dodge truck, that had to be driven "wrong-end-to" while in operation. It looks weird—but it got the seed.

AGRONOMY

NATURE RAMBLINGS by Frank Thone



New Harvests

GRASS is the only thing that will really conquer the dust storms of the West, that have been appearing as an ominous portent even in the skies of the East. But the old native-grass sod has been destroyed by scores of thousands of acres, plowed out to make room for the wheat farms that met disaster in the drought. It will replace itself only slowly, and usually after one or more generations of weeds. What to do about it?

Botanists and agronomists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture have decided that human aid can re-sod the areas that need this protection much more rapidly than the slow processes of nature would do it, if left to themselves. Recently Burton F. Kiltz of the Soil Conservation Service, whose regular station is at Salina, Kansas, right out in the middle of the problem, told a Washington audience of plant scientists what has already been accomplished, and what is in immediate prospect.

One of the toughest jobs the soil-binding army has to face is the getting of an adequate supply of seed of the right kind of grasses. It seems to be fairly well agreed that the best species in sight are the ones that made up the old original carpet of the prairies and plains. In a recent 55-day drought and hot spell, test plantings of four cultivated grasses all died, while five comparison plots of native species came through all right. That would seem to settle any reasonable question.

There are still areas where these grasses grow undisturbed and bear their plumy harvests of seed. Harvesting this seed has proved no easy task. The machinery used for cultivated crops could be adapted to gathering seeds of