



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Badlands National Park

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Badlands News Release

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Junior Ranger Discovers Important Saber Tooth Cat Fossil

BADLANDS NATIONAL PARK, Interior, S.D. — On May 30th, seven year old Kylie Ferguson discovered some fossils while participating in a junior ranger program at Badlands National Park. “She knows the characteristics of fossils because her dad is a geologist,” said Kylie’s mom. “She was really excited and now her dad will just be over the moon!”

Junior Ranger Kylie did the right thing. She reported her find to rangers. Initially, paleontologists identified the bones as belonging to the oreodont *Merycooidodon*, an extinct sheep-like animal. Heavy rain throughout the month of June exposed more of the skull and paleontologists soon realized that it was not from the sheep-like animal, but was from the extinct saber tooth cat, *Dinictis*.

All fossils are scientifically important, but this fossil find is of high importance. Skulls from saber tooth cats are rare and usually fragmented or partially eroded away. In this case, however, the fossils were found in limestone which provided protection for millions of years allowing the skull to remain in museum display quality.

Paleontologists excavated the fossils and some of the surrounding rock the week of June 21st. The fossils will be fully prepared later this summer and added to the museum collection storage at Badlands National Park.

The Ferguson family is from Sharpsburg, GA and this is the first time Kylie had visited the Badlands. Her dad had traveled through the Badlands on a previous trip to a geology field camp and he wanted to share the sites with his family. They were attending the daily 10:30 am Junior Ranger program at the Ben Reifel Visitor Center when Kylie found the fossils.



Photo: Junior Ranger Kylie Ferguson found a saber tooth cat fossil while on vacation in Badlands National Park.

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