

The First Mike the Tiger



This papier-mâché tiger was made for the Arkansas-LSU football game in 1920. Photo courtesy of Clarence A. Ives, Jr.



Chellis "Mike" Chambers visits Mike I at his first home at the Baton Rouge City Park Zoo. Photo courtesy of "Pop" Strange.



LSU students barred all entrances to the university on Oct. 21, 1936, forcing LSU's president to declare Mike I's arrival a university holiday. Photo courtesy of Gumbo, 1937.



Mike I's new home on LSU's campus in 1937.

Other mascots were proposed during the first 40 years of LSU's football team, but the tiger mascot stuck. From 1896 to 1924, students made papier-mâché tigers that they took to football games; however, these man-made mascots were quickly destroyed by opposing fans.

In 1924, a former LSU student donated a small South American cat to the university to be its live mascot, but after an unsuccessful football season, the cat was sent away. By the 1930s, the student alumni wanted a live mascot, a real symbol of the team's spirit. In 1934, several members of LSU's Athletic Department began to raise money to purchase a Bengal tiger by collecting 25 cents from each student. They raised \$750 and a 200 pound, 1-year-old tiger was purchased from the Little Rock Zoo. The man most responsible for making this happen was LSU's trainer Chellis "Mike" Chambers, and the young tiger was renamed Mike in his honor. This was Mike I, the first live tiger mascot of LSU.

Mike I arrived on LSU's campus on Oct. 21, 1936, to an amazing show of LSU's school spirit. The Cadet Corps, together with the student body, closed the university down by barring all access to the campus, forcing LSU's President James M. Smith to declare Oct. 21 a university holiday. Three days later, Mike I traveled to Shreveport to take part in the half-time show between LSU and Arkansas. From that game on, Mike traveled with the football team regularly.

Mike was at first housed at the City Park Zoo, a small facility north of LSU's campus. In 1937, he was moved into a tiger house and outdoor cage next to the football stadium, where he lived until 1956. From the beginning, the Athletic Department was responsible for Mike's day-to-day care, and students were hired from the swimming team and fraternities. Mike I was sometimes transported by train, but he usually traveled in a trailer donated by the Louisiana Highway Department. During his life as the mascot, Mike I traveled to all of the schools in the Southeastern Conference. He died from kidney disease on June 29, 1956, at the age of 20 years and eight months.

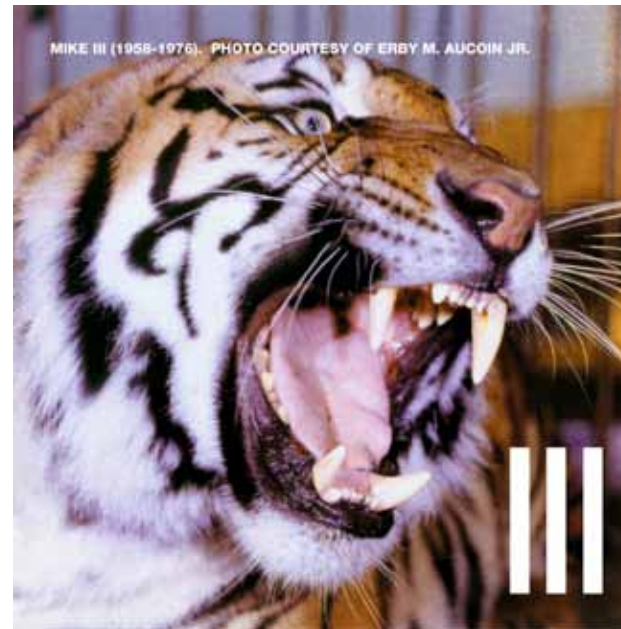


Image Caption 1:
This papier-mâché tiger was made for the Arkansas-LSU football game in 1920. Photo courtesy of Clarence A. Ives, Jr.

Image Caption 2:
Chellis "Mike" Chambers visits Mike I at his first home at the Baton Rouge City Park Zoo. Photo courtesy of "Pop" Strange.

Image Caption 3:
LSU students barred all entrances to the university on Oct. 21, 1936, forcing LSU's president to declare Mike I's arrival a university holiday. Photo courtesy of Gumbo, 1937.

Image Caption 4:
Mike I's new home on LSU's campus in 1937.

THE FIRST MIKE THE TIGER

Other mascots were proposed during the first 40 years of LSU's football team, but the tiger mascot stuck. From 1896 to 1924, students made papier-mâché tigers that they took to football games; however, these man-made mascots were quickly destroyed by opposing fans.

In 1924, a former LSU student donated a small South American cat to the university to be its live mascot, but after an unsuccessful football season, the cat was sent away. By the 1930s, the student alumni wanted a live mascot, a real symbol of the team's spirit. In 1934, several members of LSU's Athletic Department began to raise money to purchase a Bengal tiger by collecting 25 cents from each student. They raised \$750 and a 200-pound, 1-year-old tiger was purchased from the Little Rock Zoo. The man most responsible for making this happen was LSU's trainer Chellis "Mike" Chambers, and the young tiger was renamed Mike in his honor. This was Mike I, the first live tiger mascot of LSU.

Mike I arrived on LSU's campus on Oct. 21, 1936, to an amazing show of LSU's school spirit. The Cadet Corps, together with the student body, closed the university down by barring all access to the campus, forcing LSU's President James M. Smith to declare Oct. 21 a university holiday. Three days later, Mike I traveled to Shreveport to take part in the half-time show between LSU and Arkansas. From that game on, Mike traveled with the football team regularly.

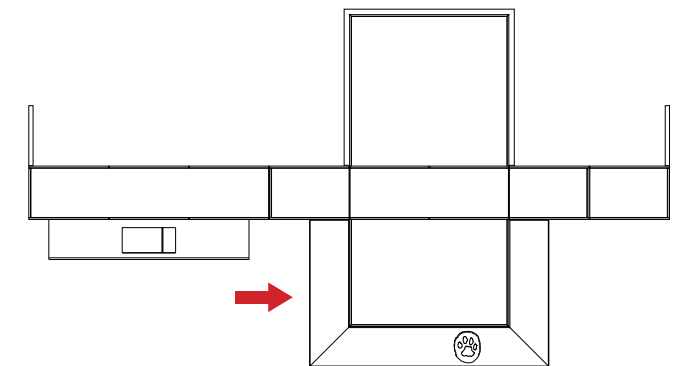
Mike was at first housed at the City Park Zoo, a small facility north of LSU's campus. In 1937, he was moved into a tiger house and outdoor cage next to the football stadium, where he lived until 1956. From the beginning, the Athletic Department was responsible for Mike's day-to-day care, and students were hired from the swimming team and fraternities. Mike I was sometimes transported by train, but he usually traveled in a trailer donated by the Louisiana Highway Department. During his life as the mascot, Mike I traveled to all of the schools in the Southeastern Conference. He died from kidney disease on June 29, 1956, at the age of 20 years and eight months.

Mike I (1935-1956)

The Bengal tiger that you see before you is the actual pelt of Mike I that was preserved so he could be displayed in this museum in perpetuity. Mike I lived on the LSU campus from 1936 to 1956. He died at the age of 20 years and eight months from kidney disease. Mike I was the first in a long tradition of tigers who have been LSU's live mascot. Mike the Tiger represents the heart and soul of LSU athletics. There have been six tigers since Mike I because there were two Mike II's. Today, Mike VI lives in his home near the football stadium.



LSU Studio portrait of Mike I.

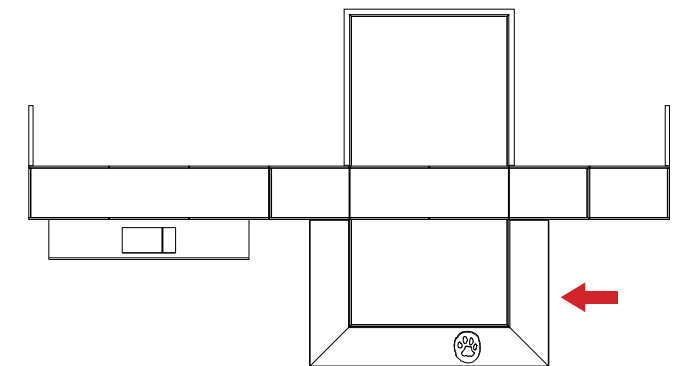




Mike I enjoys a meal.

Mike I (1935-1956)

Mike I was very well looked after as LSU's first live mascot. He was fed a daily meal of eight to 12 pounds of meat. The meat would sometimes be covered with cod liver oil and a slab of salt. For a special treat, he was given three eggs and a quart of milk to help keep his coat shiny and healthy. During World War II, however, Mike I's daily diet of meat was rationed just like everyone else's. Mike was not happy about this and students who lived in the football stadium dormitories often complained of being awakened in the middle of the night as Mike roared in protest for more food.



Mike I's Skull

In front of you is Mike I's skull. When he died at the age of 20 years and eight months, he was preserved so that he could be displayed for future generations. This is the size of a full-grown male Bengal tiger's skull.

Male tiger skulls range from 10 to 15 inches long. The female's skull is only 8 to 12 inches long. You may notice that the skull is round and very solid, to provide the necessary support for the tiger's jaws. Tigers have very powerful jaw muscles that are attached to the skull by a bony ridge that lies on top of the skull. This ridge is called the sagittal crest. The jaw muscles are used to rapidly clamp down on the tiger's prey with crushing force.

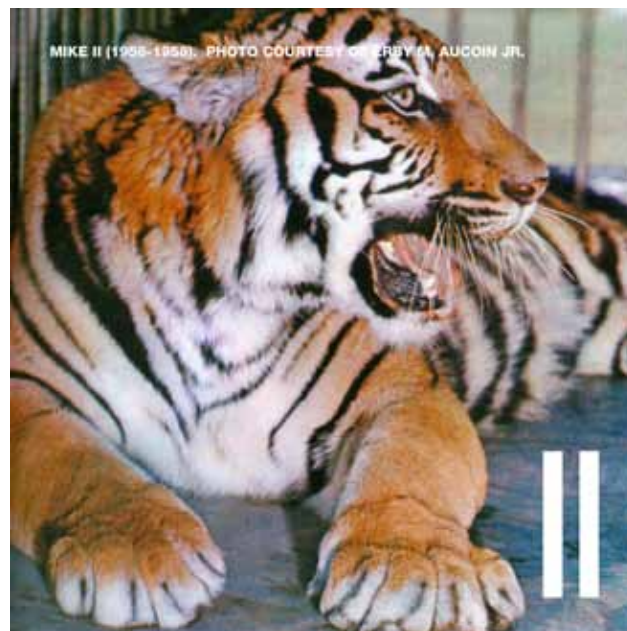
Tigers have only 30 teeth, fewer than other carnivores. However, tigers have the largest canines of any big cat species. Their canines, from above the gum line, range from 2 ½ to 3 inches in length and have special pressure-sensing nerves that enable the tigers to identify the exact location needed to sever the spinal cord of their prey.

A Worldwide Decrease in Tiger Numbers in the Wild



Since the 1900s, tiger habitat loss has been one of the main reasons for the decrease in tiger populations. This map shows tiger populations in their native habitat in 1900.

Slide the map to see tiger populations in the same habitat in 2006. Can you see how much the population has decreased? The number of tigers living in the wild today has decreased by 90% since 1900 to only approximately 3,200 tigers. Worldwide conservation efforts are underway to try to increase the number of tigers in the wild.



A WORLDWIDE DECREASE IN TIGER NUMBERS IN THE WILD

The first image that the visitor will see will be this map with only the pale yellow/green colored portions of the map showing. The key will show only "Tigers' historic range" on the map.

The second image that the visitor will see when they slide the panel will be the same map but with only the dark green portions of the map showing. The key will show only "Tigers' present range" on the map.

