**Awakening Tolkien’s DRAGON  
The story of the Railton Karst**

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# ABSTRACT

# In the Hobbit the dwarfs awoke Smaug while looking for precious gems, initiating death and destruction. In Tasmania’s Railton valley a cave system had lain dormant beneath a thick package of glacial outwash deposits and till for 240 000 years. Then in 2011 it awoke…

# This presentation details the history of Australia’s most active karst: the transformation of the Railton valley from a flat alluvial plain to a rapidly developing karst landscape, uniquely revealing a major cave system and pinnacle karst buried by glacial outwash 240 000 years ago. Lowering of the regional water table has resulted in the karst being exhumed, re-routing of a large surface tributary of the Mersey River that now flows south rather than north into the Mersey River, new sinkholes up to 150 m wide and 15 m deep, and massive erosion of about 100 000 cubic metres of sediment and trees into the cave system.