

REDBANK GORGE – WEST MACDONNELL RANGES

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Redbank Gorge is one of those unexpected outback places that we promise you'll go home raving about.



Even though I'd heard all about Redbank from friends, I didn't go there until I'd been living in the outback for almost 6 years.

As you can see from the photo, it was a complete blast lilo-ing up the narrow gorge into cool, secret places which are hidden from the rest of the world.

Like Uluru, Redbank is a place you need to see with your own eyes to really appreciate it.

The Gorge is less than two hours drive west of Alice Springs.

The recently upgraded road means that ordinary vehicles can easily make the trip.

We love Redbank Gorge and think it's one place that you shouldn't miss out on during your trip through the West Mac's.

On this page, we'll tell you how to get there, what to see and do, and take you on a video tour of the campgrounds.

What's so Special About Redbank Gorge?

Redbank Gorge sits at the base of Mt. Sonder, the best known, most photographed, painted and loved mountain in the West MacDonnells (just ask any Central Australian!).

Like Mount Sonder, Redbank Gorge is a sacred site for Western Arrernte Aboriginal people.



And just like Mount Sonder, the Gorge's Dreaming Story is connected to the Euro (small kangaroo) ancestor who travels through the area.

As this is a story restricted to initiated Aboriginal men, we are unable to share anymore information about the story here.

However, we can tell you that the name of Redbank in Western Arrernte is *Yarreteyeke* (Yuh-ret-CHUCKA).

The name of Mount Sonder is *Rrewtyepme* (Rroo-CHOOP-muh).

Redbank is not only important to Aboriginal people, it's also an important refuge for plants and animals because it's a permanent waterhole.

This means that if you're looking to see Rock Wallabies, kangaroos, birds, frogs or you're looking for some wildflowers to photograph in spring, Redbank is a place you'll love.

I've spent some time birdwatching here and seen Black-Chinned Honeyeaters with very little effort.



I've also been told that Grey Honeyeaters (an extremely boring but rare and semi-mythical bird amongst Australian twitchers) hang out here, too.

Here, if you take the trip up the gorge, you can see in cross section the geology of the area – the photo gives you some idea of this.

To get an incredibly spectacular overview of the western end of the MacDonnell Ranges it is also possible to walk up Mt. Sonder, section 12 of the Larapinta Trail, in all its splendour right from the day use area.

How to Get There:

Redbank Gorge is located 156km west of Alice Springs via Larapinta and Namatjira Drives in the West MacDonnell National Park.

It is accessed by a sealed road initially then an unsealed 5km road into the gorge. It is generally accessible all year round except in times of heavy rain and subsequent flooding although it is recommended that vehicles should have high clearance.

View [Redbank Gorge](#) in a larger map

From [Alice Springs](#), travel west along Larapinta Drive for 50 km, until you reach the intersection with Namatjira Drive. Turn right onto Namatjira Drive and keep heading west another 100 km or so until you see the signs into Redbank Gorge.

If you're travelling the Red Centre Way to get to [Kings Canyon](#) or [Ayers Rock](#) you can also stop in at Redbank and then continue on via Tyler's Pass to reconnect to your route.

What to Do:

Redbank Gorge is great for swimming, camping, hiking, photography, birdwatching and exploring.

If you like to walk then, there are a few choices here.

The walk down to the gorge takes you along a narrow track initially and then into the creek bed itself, it will take you about 20 minutes.

Redbank is also the junction of sections 11-12 of the Larapinta Trail. Section 12 of the Larapinta Trail is the final part of a 223km trek that starts at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station.

Section 12 of the Larapinta Trail is also one of the most popular walks in Central Australia in its own right: it is a magnificent walk up Mt. Sonder (1380m).



The return walk to Mount Sonder's summit will take you anywhere up to 8 hours, depending on how fast you walk. This is a walk that we've done many times and I'll always jump at the opportunity to hike up this mountain again.

Personally, it's never taken me more than 4 hours return – and that's with an hour's break for lunch and a cuppa on top, so I always find it hard to believe that it takes people 8 hours (Gary tells me it does!).

Be aware that the first part of the hike is a steep uphill walk, and then although it isn't quite so steep for the rest of the way, it's still uphill (you're climbing a mountain, after all), so take the usual precautions before deciding to do this walk.

Redbank Gorge is also the setting off point for walkers who choose to do the whole or parts of the Larapinta Trail starting from the west.

For more info on the Trail please visit our page on the [Larapinta Trail](#) itself.



Redbank is also popular for swimming – especially in summer. Sometimes the water in the gorge can be a bit off due to lack of rain, but if the area has had recent rain then you'll love it.

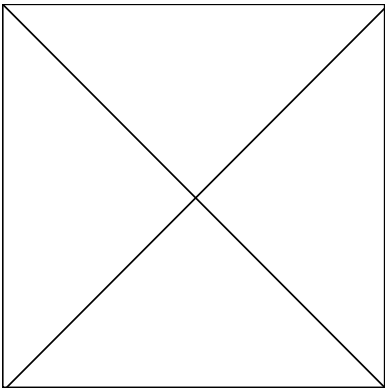
The trip up the gorge is also a wonderful way of experiencing what this place offers and a good way to do this without swimming all the way is to take a li-lo, tyre tube or other flotation device.

Keep in mind however the water can be absolutely freezing and as always please consider your fitness and walk prepared with plenty of water, a hat and sturdy shoes.

Facilities:

Redbank Gorge has two separate camping areas with free gas BBQs, picnic tables and pit toilets.

We've made a video of these camping areas so you can see exactly what they're like.



The first campground you come to is called the Woodland camp and this has a quite large loop with sites spaced around the loop to provide some space between campers.

This great site has pit toilets, free gas bbqs and fire pits although you must collect your wood before entering the Park.

The next campground is called the Ridgetop camp and as its name suggests it is perched upon the crest of a small ridgetop and provides wonderful views at both sunrise and sunset.

This camp is a lot smaller than the Woodlands camp but still provides wood bbqs, tables and a pit toilet.



Camping fees are payable at both sites and both cater for camper trailers and tents (although the ground is quite hard on the Ridgetop).

Camping costs: \$3.30/adult, \$1.65/child (5-15 years), \$7.70/family (2 adults and 4 children).

Our advice: get here early in the peak winter (May-August) season and find your camp site.

There is also a day use area near the gorge which provides space to park your vehicle, shelters and a toilet.

It's a great little area to prepare for your walk or to relax after your return from either the gorge or your walk up Mt. Sonder.

When to Go:

Redbank Gorge is a place that you can go anytime of the year, but if you want to swim I suggest the warmer months or to take a wetsuit!



The Woodland campground has a bit of shade so it's better placed than some of the other camping spots for a longer stay. The Ridgetop camp has little shade but is great during winter.

For camping and walking, it's best to visit from April-October, when it's a bit cooler.

It's an easy day trip from [Alice Springs](#) if you don't want to camp, but you'll need most of the day if you're planning a visit. My advice though is if you want to take in what Redbank has to offer then spend at least a night here to get the most out of the location.

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