

Battle of Blair Mountain

In August 1921, armed coal miners from the Kanawha Valley and the southern counties of Boone, Fayette, Mingo, McDowell, and Logan gathered at Marmet in Kanawha County. The miners proposed to march to Logan and Mingo counties to rescue union miners who had been jailed or mistreated in attempts to unionize the mines. Their efforts brought on the most spectacular confrontation in West Virginia's labor history, the culminating event in the era known as the [Mine Wars](#).

While accurate figures are not available, sources estimate the number of miners who participated in the march at anywhere from 7,000 to 20,000. Many were veterans of [World War I](#), and they organized themselves like an army division. The marchers had medical and supply units, posted guards when appropriate, and used passwords to weed out infiltrators. Marchers commandeered trains and other vehicles to take them to Logan County and confiscated supplies from company stores along the march.

State authorities, led by [Governor Morgan](#), quickly organized a group of state police, volunteer militia companies, and coal company employees to keep the miners from invading Logan County. The opposing forces came together at Blair Mountain, near the Boone and Logan borders. The well-armed miners and their opponents battled along the ridge of Blair Mountain, resulting in several deaths. Like other statistics in this event, the exact numbers of killed and wounded are mere conjecture.

Morgan urgently requested federal intervention to end the bloodshed. President Warren G. Harding responded with 2,500 federal troops, including a bomber squadron under aviation pioneer Gen. [William "Billy" Mitchell](#). The federal troops quickly brought the conflict to an end, and the miners returned home. Several hundred miners and their leaders were charged with various crimes from murder to treason. Most were given minor sentences, but serious attempts were made to punish [William "Bill" Blizzard](#), one of the march leaders, [who was charged with treason](#). He was tried in Charles Town, Lewisburg, and Fayetteville before the charges were eventually dropped.

The armed march and the Battle of Blair Mountain resulted in little or no gain for union miners, but the hostilities created by labor strife from the early 1900s to the 1920s color labor relations in West Virginia to the present.

In 2006, the National Trust for Historic Preservation designated Blair Mountain as one of the country's "Most Endangered Historic Places." The [National Park Service](#) added Blair Mountain to its [National Register of Historic Places](#) in March 2009. Nine months later the park service reversed its decision following a dispute about property ownership on the mountain.

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Citations

- Corbin, David A. *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners 1880-1922*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981.
- Savage, Lon. *Thunder in the Mountains*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990.



