

# Brian Bushway Leading The Blind

## *An unlikely mountain bike leader*

**B**rian Bushway was 14 when it happened. He had been on his school's mountain bike team while in seventh grade in Rancho Santa Margarita, California, and loved to ride. Then his eyesight started getting bad.

"The doctors didn't know why I was going blind," says Bushway, now 26. "I was an active 14-year-old, skating and stuff. My vision started affecting all these things in small ways. Finally, I remember waking up one morning and I had barely usable vision. And then, the next morning, I woke up and it was gone."

Ready to ride: Brian Bushway had a great excuse to quit mountain biking, but he is not a man known for making excuses. The blind-man's cane gets him from his home to the trail. He straps it to the rack when he takes off.



Doctors diagnosed it as optic nerve atrophy, but they couldn't stop it. In four months, he went from having normal vision to a world of darkness. "I remember being in a state of unknowing. I didn't know how to process it. I felt 'done' as a mortal being. I asked God why it was happening. There's a natural grieving process when this happens to someone. Still, the hardest part about going blind was how everybody treated me differently."

Brian's parents enrolled him in a school that teaches mobility skills to the blind. While there, he learned that Andy Griffin and Dan Kish, two instructors on staff, were experimenting with mountain biking for the blind. Griffin, a fully sighted instructor and regular mountain biker, had found he could ride his bike blindfolded, using the sound cues of his girlfriend riding in front of him, and he thought blind students might enjoy riding, too. Kish, who had grown up completely blind, had learned to ride a bike in his neighborhood with his friends as a kid. Brian Bushway and some other students heard about the blind mountain biking experiments and wanted to do it too, so the Blind Adventure Travel Society, the name they came up with for the group, was born.

The BATS began to go on regular mountain bike rides in the hilly trails south of Los Angeles. With zip-ties clicking against their spokes, they could follow each other by ear, with instructor Griffin leading. A story on the BATS appeared in our May 2001 issue, and that led to exposure by Australian, Japanese and European media outlets. Television crews traveled thousands of miles to tape the group's rides. Bushway, the most skilled blind rider, was featured prominently in the coverage; taking on stair-step downhills, narrow singletrack trails, and rocky stream crossings.

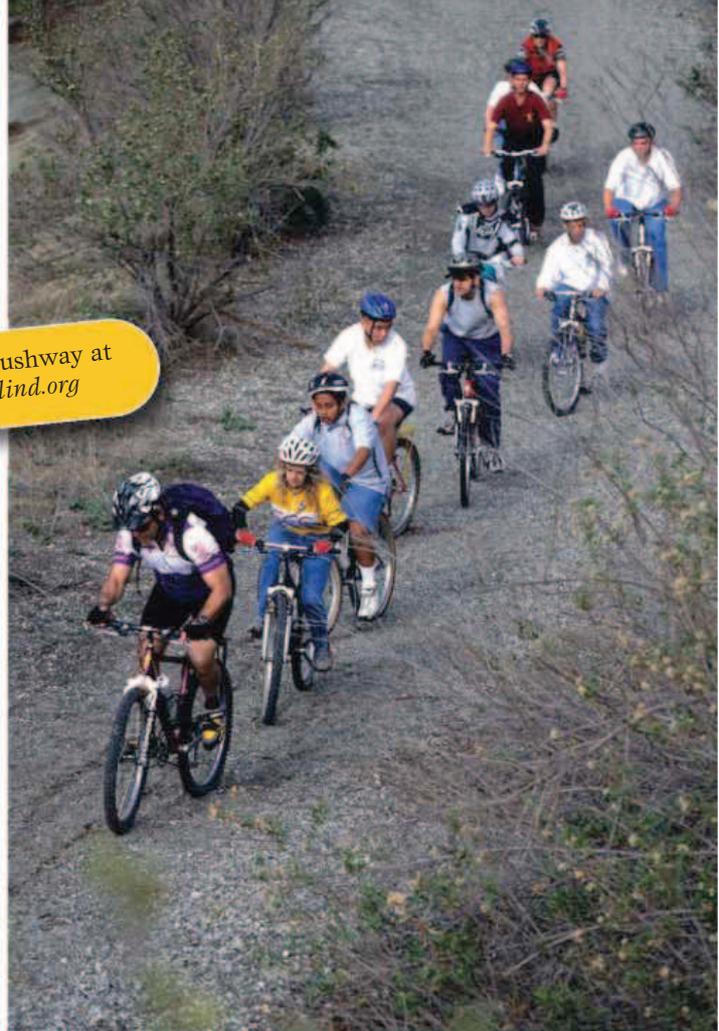
The BATS shrunk over the years as riders headed off to college or careers. Griffin got a job at another school, and Kish left to start his own nonprofit business, World Access for the Blind, teaching mobility skills, including echolocation, to the visually handicapped. Bushway attended Pepperdine University and then joined Kish's organization, which they now run together.

Brian found that mountain biking helped blind students face the world with confidence and courage. In recent months, Brian's mountain biking has usually been done for the benefit of documentary crews and cameras, but that's about to change. A number of his teenage students recently started bugging Brian to take them mountain biking. It's time for the BATS to rise again. □

No handicapped parking: BATS co-founder Andy Griffin leads a group of blind riders in 2001. Brian (fourth from rear) and the group's co-founder, Dan Kish (beside Brian in the dark shirt) do what most would consider impossible.

You can contact Brian Bushway at [www.worldaccessfortheblind.org](http://www.worldaccessfortheblind.org)

Finding his way: Merely getting from the garage to the trail head is a major challenge when you're blind. Brian strapped his cane to the back of his bike when he was ready to ride.



Good trails: Brian has a great trail system behind his house, but finds it hard to get a group together for rides. It's not that they don't want to ride; none of them can drive to the trailhead.