

# Horseman rides across nation to save rainforests

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An Arizona businessman left Huntington Beach early this morning on an 8-year-old Arabian horse to begin a 3,000-mile, cross-country odyssey in an effort to raise awareness and money for the preservation of tropical rainforests.

Lucian Spataro's "Ride Across America" on gray gelding Sweet William is expected to span five months and would break a Guinness World Record for horseriding distance and time.

The pair will pass through Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Indiana, Ohio, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania before ending up in New York.

In between, they will stop in cities and towns for various fund-raising events and public appearances. All proceeds from the fund-raisers and from public and corporate pledges will go to the Rainforest Action Network, a San Francisco-based, non-profit activist organization that works to save the world's tropical rainforests from destruction.

Spataro and Sweet William spent the last week in Huntington Beach riding on hills and busy streets to train the horse for his trek. "I rode into downtown Huntington a few days ago, in 7:30 (a.m.), rush-hour traffic," Spataro said.

Spataro had already spent the last six months working Sweet William through the streets of Tucson, Ariz.

Spataro conceived the idea to ride a horse across the country for the rainforest cause a couple of years ago. He became interested in the issue of rainforests after visiting them during trips for his electronics assembly business.

"I'm an avid athlete," he said, "and I wanted an event that would make people stand up and take notice."

The Al-Marah Ranch of Tucson donated the horse. Meanwhile, Spataro's search for a group aimed at the rainforest cause led him to the 13,000-member Rainforest Action Network and the En-

vironmental Police Institute in Washington D.C., both which backed his plan and helped him organize the ride.

"He's a concerned citizen," Randy Hayes, executive director of RAN, said.

The network hopes to collect \$1 million in pledges through the ride. Some of the money will go directly to the Amazonian Indian tribes to pay for their costs to travel and speak for preservation of the rainforests, Hayes said.

The approximately \$50,000 cost for the horse's cross-country trek has been paid through donations of feed, tack and gear and other necessary supplies.

Automobile dealership owner Jim Click, who has several Arizona locations in addition to several Orange County branches, donated the Ford truck that will pull the trailer.

Among the support team accompanying the horse and rider will be a caretaker who will monitor the animal's health throughout the ride. The support team will also keep in constant contact with the horse's veterinarian.

Although the Arabian is historically an endurance horse, Spataro took great care to be kind to the animal while planning the ride.

Spataro plans to travel 15 to 25 miles a day at a walking pace and to do most of the riding between 5 and 10 a.m., since much of the route is through hotter, southern states. The pair may also ride on moonlit nights when the temperature is cooler and traffic is less heavy, Hayes said.

Plotting the route also involved obtaining permits for all the cities he would pass through.

"We wanted to find the shortest, straightest path between Los Angeles and New York," Spataro said. "We also wanted to go through a pretty strong population base."

Spataro contacted the Huntington Beach equestrian center off Goldenwest Street after he decided traveling up the Santa Ana River would be the best route out of Los Angeles.