



Photo by Dave Schmid

Lucian Spataro guides his Arabian gelding, "Sea Ruler," to the end of a day's ride east of Benton on Highway 14 Monday. He is riding across the nation to alert people about the harm being done to the earth's rain forests.

Rider travels nation to save rain forests

By Dave Schmid

In ancient times, Bedouin tribes of the Middle East trained these horses to endure the fierce desert sun.

This summer, a man is riding Arabian geldings across the country in an effort to save a very different part of the world from where these majestic horses were bred: the tropical rain forest.

The rider is Lucian Spataro, 32, a horse trainer from Tucson, Ariz. He passed through Benton Monday morning, going east on State Highway 14.

Spataro said he hopes

'It's a long, long way. Monotony kicks in.'

Lucian Spataro, on 2,850-mile trip across United States

coast-to-coast journey will alert people to the dangers threatening the world's tropical regions, which comprise only 2 percent of the

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earth's surface, yet provide habitat for 40 to 50 percent of its plant and animal life.

Human beings are advancing rapidly on the world's rain forests, destroying an average of 50 million acres a year, according to the Rainforest Action Network, the California based non-profit coalition which is sponsoring Spataro's trip. At this rate of destruction, these dense and humid jungles will be erased from the map by the middle of next century, network members say.

Riding an average of 22 miles a day, Spataro has another goal. He wants to break the Guinness World Record for distance riding on horseback.

Since he left Los Angeles May 19, Spataro already has established a record for the longest distance and shortest time riding a single horse. He rode an Arabian horse a

distance of 1,553 miles over the course of 63 days.

Since late July, Spataro has been alternately riding two Arabians, 6-year-old Sea Ruler and 12-year-old March Along.

He hopes to set another distance record when he reaches Washington, D.C. in mid-October, when he will have ridden 2,850 miles.

The long ride has taken its toll on horse and rider.

Spataro said his horses have been eating an average of 15 pounds of grain a day. Normally, they only eat three.

And Spataro admits that he sometimes has to fight off boredom. "It's a long, long way," Spataro said, "Monotony kicks in."

Donations can be made to the Rainforest Action Network, 301 Broadway 'A', San Francisco, Calif., 94133.