

TRI-STATE

He'll be back in the saddle for 900 miles

Rider makes horseback trip across America

By **BETSY STANTON**
 Courier staff writer

SELVIN, Ind. — A man on horseback is no rare sight in rural Warrick County, unless you consider this trail ride has been 2,100 miles so far.

Lucian Spataro saddled up in Los Angeles on May 19 and wants to reach the East Coast by mid-October. His trek past the rivers and mountains of the United States is made in defense of another natural resource — rain forests. He's seeking support for the Rainforest Action Network based in San Francisco.

This week he carried his "Ride Across America" to Yellow Banks campground in Selvin, a resting place on the long ride he's taking coast to coast, said helper Brad Braden.

Spataro, 32, a blend of businessman, equestrian and environmentalist, planned this trip four years ago while diving in Mexico. After Spataro dove from a cliff, a friend asked him what his next feat would be. "I'm going to ride a horse across America," he said. Last year, he said he found the reason to do it.

RAN believes the destruction of tropical rain forests means the loss of up to 5 million species of plants, animals and insects and the chance to develop cancer antidotes from the forests' medicinal plants. It fears more than half the original forests have been destroyed.

Several corporate sponsors are funding Spataro's trip, including the Al-Marah Ranch of Tucson, Ariz., Spataro's hometown. The ranch provided Spataro's gentle Arabian mounts, Sea Ruler and March Along. With the aid of Braden

and Braden's wife, Joyce, who set up camp for Spataro along the way, he can change horses every day.

The Bradens go ahead of Spataro to set up camp, picking up horse and rider at the end of the day. The next morning, they return him to the place he stopped the night before.

At 20 to 30 miles a day, the trip is slow. "But how many people get to see America the way we're seeing it?" asked Braden, a semi-retired horseman.

Until he reached Oklahoma, Spataro rode mostly on interstate highways. More by choice, he's riding now on secondary roads, taking time to talk rain forests with the campers and passers-by who gravitate to the horses.

That's the plan, Braden chuckled. The animals are a good conversation piece. "Horses will draw people the same as they draw flies."

Larger cities are also hosting RAN fundraisers. At the end of the road, Spataro thinks his personal contacts will total 10,000 people.

The hardest part of the ride is mental, he admitted. After riding the first 1,000 miles on adrenaline, "it starts to kick in that there's still 2,000 to go," he said. "I try to stay alert, because the cars going by have a hypnotic effect on the horse and me."

Spataro has taken the road in breath-freezing cold, and desert heat that reached 117 degrees. He wore a yellow slicker Thursday to protect him from the misty rain. He's never had a serious illness or accident on the road, although both he and one of the horses tumbled down an embankment a few days ago.

Spataro hopes his ride also will earn him a place in the Guinness Book of World Records for time and distance. He's been in there already as part of a team of scuba divers who rode a tricycle 64 miles underwater in a pool.



Courier photo by **BETSY STANTON**
 Lucian Spataro aboard Sea Ruler near Selvin, Ind.