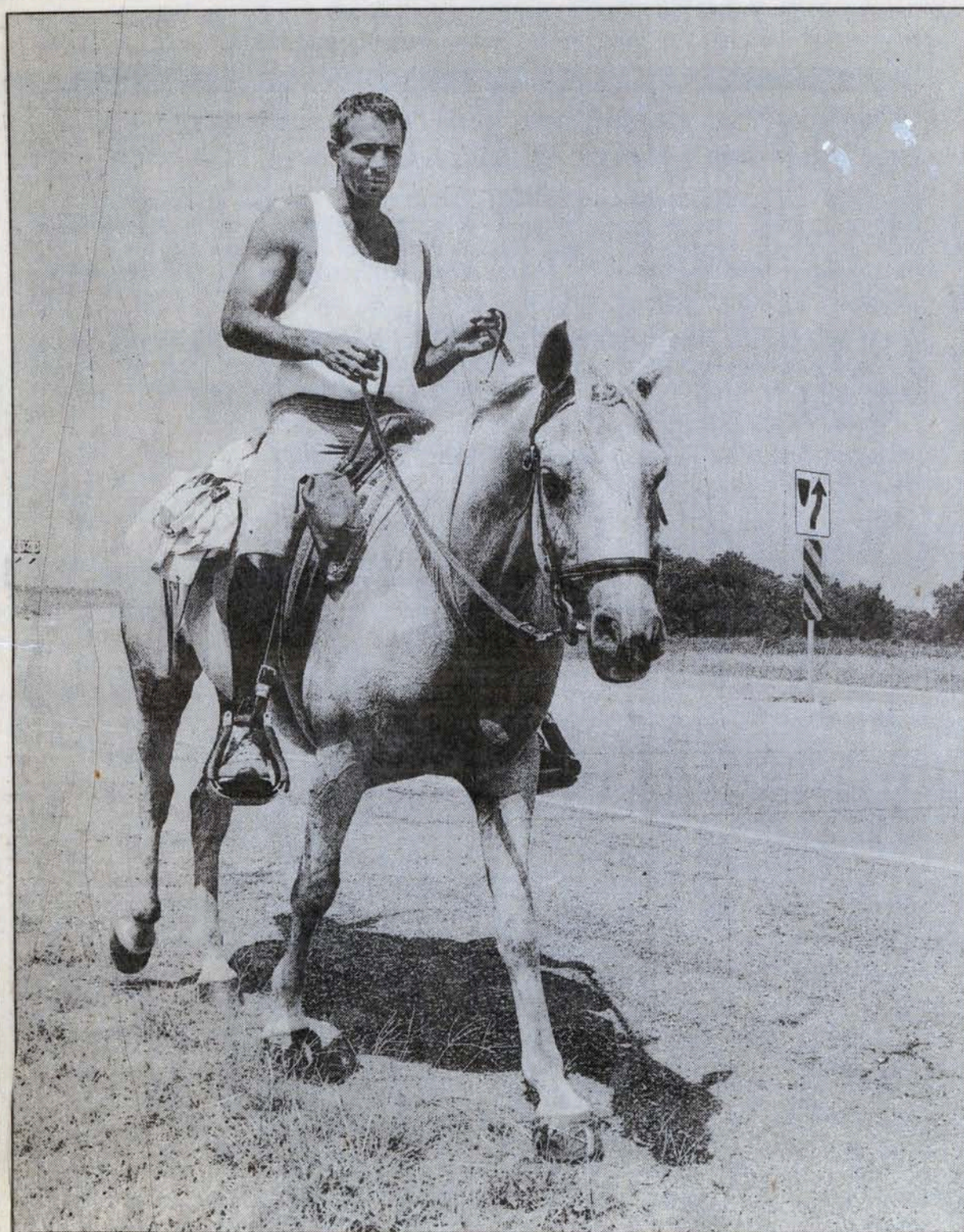


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Lucian Spataro, 32, will be traveling through Missouri today on his cross-country ride to call attention to endangered rain forests.

Globe Photos/VINCE ROSATI



Lucian Spataro and his Arabian horse travel about 25 miles day.

Rider hitches up to ecological issue

By Marti Attoun
Globe Staff Writer

Lucian Spataro and Sweet William, his Arabian gelding, were happy to trot into Oklahoma, but were even happier to hit Missouri. It means their 3,000-mile trek is more than half finished.

Spataro, 32, an environmentalist and athlete from Tucson, Ariz., is riding across America to raise public awareness and funds for the Rainforest Action Network. He left Los Angeles, Calif., on May 19 and hopes to reach Washington D.C. in early October.

Bob Shepard, who is videotaping the ride and helping with publicity, says the ride's purpose is twofold: to draw attention to the country's depleting tropical rain forests so the public will talk to people who have impact on policies affecting the rain forests, and to raise \$1 million in contributions.

Spataro rides about 25 miles a day and makes frequent stops along the way to address civic groups, distribute brochures and attend

fund-raisers.

Rain forests cover less than two percent of the globe, but are home to as many as 5 million species of plants, animals and insects. More than 25 percent of all medicines marketed in U.S. pharmacies come from plants grown in rain forests. More than half of the original rain forests have been destroyed.

Spataro also hopes to set a Guinness World Record for horse-riding distance and time. He's already in the Guinness book for pedaling a tricycle on the bottom of a swimming pool, along with other scuba divers, for 60 hours and 64.96 miles. That effort raised \$30,000 for a Tucson charity for battered children.

The Rainforest Action Network based in San Francisco, Calif., is a non-profit international conservation group. The group achieved a recent victory in preserving the last 28,000 acres of rain forest in Puerto Rico. The group is campaigning now to halt the use of tropical timber imports.