

Equestrian Crossing U.S. to Educate Americans to Rain Forest Woes

By Lisa Tresch
World Staff Writer

Lucian Spataro is riding horseback across the country to warn people that the world's rain forests are in trouble.

During a stop in Tulsa Thursday, Spataro, who is a member of the Rainforest Action Network (RAN), said Oklahoma is a challenging place to educate people about rain forests.

"People don't realize that just because there are no rain forests in this part of the country, doesn't mean they aren't affected by the deterioration of the forests."

Spataro began his 2,800-mile "Ride Across America" in Los Angeles on May 19 and will finish the record-breaking ride in Maryland in September. He will travel through about 13 states at a rate of about 22 miles a day.

He hopes to establish a Guinness World Record for horse riding distance and time during the

journey. He also hopes to let people know the realities involved in destroying the rain forests.

"The forests are destroyed at a rate of one acre per second," Spataro said. "If the rate stays steady, by the year 2000 there will be virtually no rain forests. They used to cover 14 percent of the earth's surface, and in 35 years, we've reduced that to 7 percent."

Spataro said the rain forests are a moderator of weather, and often make the difference of how much rain is received and how much humidity exists.

"As we ride into some of the smaller towns, we find that people are not really aware of the rain forest problems," Spataro said. "We really are concentrating on raising the awareness level about the issue."

Spataro has traveled on Interstate-40 through California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma.

Fund-raisers held along the

way have provided RAM with almost \$80,000. The money, he said, will go toward educational programs, printed materials and lobbying efforts.

"This is not really an activist thing," Spataro said. "It's very low-key. We just want to let people know what is going on and tell them the realities of the problems."

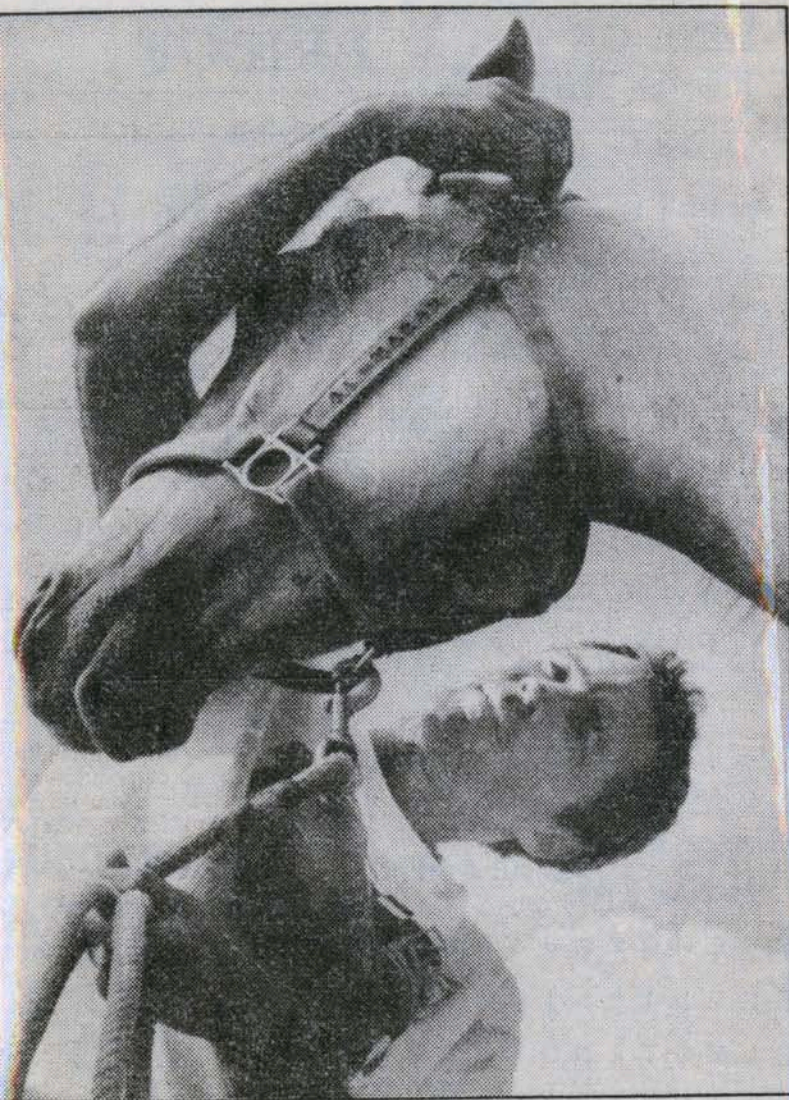
Spataro, 31, is an equestrian trainer from Tucson, Ariz., who came up with the idea for the cross-country ride about two years ago. Planning, he said, has taken two years.

"Our goal was to raise \$1 million," he said. "I don't think we really expected to do that, but it is something to shoot for."

Spataro is alternating riding several horses, and traveling with eight other people who follow him in recreational vehicles. The group stayed at the Hilltop RV Park in Sapulpa Thursday night.

The Al-Marah Ranch of Tucson, Ariz., provided Spataro with Arabian horses and corporate sponsors are providing tack and gear.

RAN is a non-profit corporation based in San Francisco.



World staff photo by Ron Hart

Lucian Spataro puts a bridle on Sea Ruler.