



Man riding horse cross country to boost awareness of rain forests

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After being on horseback almost continuously for more than three months, it would seem that Lucian Spataro might be growing a little tired of cheerleading the cause he's been pitching for the last 1,500 miles.

But, with another 1,500 miles to go, Spataro, of Tuscon, Ariz., isn't about to slow down until he's increased the country's awareness of a seemingly unlikely cause for the 31-year-old horseman: rain forests.

"It's the ecosystem we're losing the quickest," Spataro said of the forests that cover about 2 percent of the Earth's surface. "If you don't have an environment, who cares about the rest? It's the basis of everything we do. AIDS and homelessness ceases to be a problem if you have no ecosystem."

Spataro, a member of the San Francisco-based Rainforest Action Network, has ridden about 22 miles a day since May 19, when he and Sweet William, an 8-year-old Arabian, stepped off the shore of the Pacific Ocean in Los Angeles. He doesn't plan to stop until he reaches New York City sometime in September.

Along the way, he and his four-member support team, traveling with him in three recreational vehicles, have attended fund raisers and talked to just about anyone within

shouting distance about rain forests.

Spataro and company probably reach about 50 people a day just by riding through small towns and at the trailer parks they stop at every night, he said. By the time they reach New York, Spataro estimates he will have talked to several thousand people about the forests.

"It's a real grass-roots approach to generate interest, but it's probably the best way," he said.

The increasingly rapid destruction of the forests — primarily by industrial and agricultural development in Third World nations — is paving the way for accelerated global warming and could jeopardize countless species of plant and animals, according to the Rainforest Action Network. Since World War II, about half of the world's rain forests have been lost, the group said.

In addition to raising funds and awareness of the issue, Spataro hopes to make it into the Guinness Book of World Records for one-man, one-horse cross-country riding.

The board of directors for the ride is in the process of organizing a 200-horse march into Washington, D.C., once the team reaches that point. By the end of the ride, the group hopes to have raised close to \$1 million for rain forest projects, such as teaching residents more prudent ways to cultivate the land without jeopardizing the forests.

The team is staying at the Overnite Trailer Inn east of town until Sunday.



Lucian Spataro and his horse, Sweet William.

Henry Bargas / Globe-News