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Lucian Spataro and his horse Sweet William crusade for the preservation of the earth's rain forests.

Man rides range for rain forests in attempt to increase awareness

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Amarillo is the latest stopping point for a Tucson, Ariz., horseman riding across the continent to increase awareness of the earth's rain forests.

Lucian Spataro, 31, his 8-year-old Arabian gelding Sweet William and his four-person, three-RV support team began their trek on May 19 at the shore of the Pacific Ocean in Los Angeles. They plan to end in September in New York, about 3,000 miles away.

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 San Francisco-based Rainforest Action Network. Since World War II, about half of the world's rain forests have been lost, the group said.

"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 cease to be a problem if you have no ecosystem."

Along the 1,500 mile route they have covered so far, Spataro and company have attend-

ed fund-raisers and talked to just about anyone within shouting distance about rain forests.

"It adds up," he said. They 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.

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.

"Some people think we're a bit eccentric," he said. "It's going to take some eccentricities to make people aware of this issue quick enough. We just want Congress and the president to realize that there are people concerned about the issue."