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Lucian Spataro and horse travel on U.S. 50 at Upperville.

Ride across U.S. comes to Catlett

By MARK SCOLFORO

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CATLETT — Lucian Spataro celebrated the end of his record-setting horse ride across the United States at a fundraiser in Catlett Saturday, but still termed the trek a qualified success.

Spataro rode 2,780 miles in 116 days to bring attention to the problem of rain forest destruction in Central and South America, a subject about which he said the public is too ignorant.

He estimated that he talked to about 75 people each day of the ride, and many of them knew little about the problem.

"On a scale of one-to-10, I'd call this a 7.7," said Spataro Saturday, at a fundraiser organized by his childhood friend, Terry Dudias, at Cedar Lee Farm. "I wanted to set the record and draw attention to the issue, and we did both of those."

On the fundraising front, however, Spataro said the \$100,000 he raised for the Rainforest Action Network was "a little shy."

He hopes that the judges at Guinness World Records will accept the first part of his ride as the record for the longest trek by one rider and one horse. After that horse was unable to continue, Spataro finished the second half of the ride with two others. All three horses are Arabians.

He began in Huntington Beach, Calif., during rush hour, and ended in Chesapeake City, Md., on Oct. 15. The ride, said Spataro, was one-fourth boredom, one-fourth panic, one-fourth strange and one-fourth interesting.

At the fundraiser in Catlett, Char Magaro of the Pennsylvania branch of the Rainforest Action Network gave a brief talk to the 30-40 people assembled there.

"The whole purpose of the Ride Across America was to elevate awareness among Americans why we need the rain forest for a healthy planet," said Ms. Magaro.

"One-half of our original tropical rain forests have been destroyed. The rain forests keep an ecological balance on our planet," she said.

Rain forests are being destroyed at a rate of 50 million acres a year, an area the size of England, Scotland and Wales.

Destruction of the rain forests may influence climate, the ozone, and availability of certain rare pharmaceuticals.

Spataro said he wanted "people to realize that there is a group of people putting a lot of energy into something," so he devised the Ride Across America as a publicity stunt.

The money he raised during the ride, which itself cost about \$60,000, will go toward Rainforest Action Network projects in Central and South America.

The last leg of the ride was along U.S. 50 from Ohio through West Virginia and into Fauquier County at Paris. He finished up by crossing Memorial Bridge after stopping in Arlington National Cemetery.

"A lot of things can happen up here as a result of deforestation," said Spataro. "We really don't know their impact — we're involved in a type of experiment."

Ms. Dudias got involved after she read an article about Spataro in *Equus* magazine, and remembered him as her brother's best friend during their childhood in Ohio.

She contacted him through the Rainforest Action Network, and he asked her to produce a fundraiser for him while the team passed through the area.

"I hadn't been very aware of what a serious problem the rain forest issue is," said Ms. Dudias, "but the more I learn the more I think it's

an important issue."
(Editor's note: For more information about the rainforests, write: The Rainforest Action Network, 301 Broadway, Suite A, San Francisco, Calif. 94133).