

## Ryan Semmel – Geocaching - 2

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Let's go hunting. No, not for deer or turkey. Today we are going hunting for a geocache, a hidden container which we can find with the aid of GPS technology. The practice of finding geocaches is not only attracting visitors to Kansas, it is even bringing a major gathering of geocachers to our state in spring 2017. This is today's Kansas Profile.

Last week we met geocaching enthusiast Ryan Semmel. He is a leader of the effort to bring a major geocaching event to Kansas. After serving in the Army overseas and most recently at Fort Riley, he retired in Manhattan. Ryan and his wife have two daughters and a son.

Ryan enjoys geocaching, the practice of finding hidden caches outdoors through the use of GPS technology. The caches are small containers containing a logbook and sometimes trinkets for exchange. Someone will hide the cache and then post it on the geocaching.com website for people to find. When a cache is found, the finder enters his or her user name in the logbook, exchanges gifts if desired, and then posts about it on the website.

Ryan enjoys exploring the outdoors and sharing the experience with others. "It has taken me to places that not everybody gets to see," he said. Ryan started a Facebook group for Flint Hills Geocaching which has about 200 members.

Then he heard about something called MOGA: Midwest Open Geocaching Adventure. Essentially, this was an open contest where geocachers would compete to see how many geocaches could be found within a limited time.

"I like the competitive aspect," Ryan said. He went to a big MOGA event in Jackson, Missouri, and heard the organizers say that they like to go to new and different places. He wondered if MOGA could be brought to Manhattan, Kansas. Ryan worked with several partners, got encouragement from Marcia Rozell at the Manhattan Convention and Visitors Bureau, and ultimately submitted a successful bid for Manhattan to host MOGA in 2017.

Ryan estimates that hundreds of geocachers will come to Manhattan for MOGA on April 20-23, 2017. There will be both individual and team competitions where geocachers try to find the most caches possible within 2.5 hours. The caches will be located in rugged, rural Flint Hills terrain in the hills overlooking the community of Zeandale which has a population of perhaps 30 people. Now, that's rural.

For the competition, each contestant will get a punchcard and a map. The caches, which are the size of pillboxes, will contain a punch which the finder uses to mark his or her card once the cache is found. The one with the most finds wins. In order to make it fair, competitors are grouped with others of the same age and gender.

MOGA also offers a geocaching competition for those who are disabled. That will take place at Tuttle Creek State Park.

The hosts in Manhattan have created some beautiful medallions as keepsakes of this event. One is a spinner which features the MOGA logo and the seven wonders of Kansas on one side and the state seal of Kansas on the other. The other is an award coin, like a medal for the competitors, which has a gorgeous Kansas sunflower design.

“The event is free but everyone needs to register,” Ryan said. “Don’t stay away if you feel like you don’t know about geocaching” he said. “This is for everyone.”

MOGA is a major event. The Midwest Open Geocaching Adventure is the largest geocaching competition in the world. Manhattan, Kansas is the farthest west that MOGA has been held. The 2017 event will be the first of its kind in Kansas.

“People will have a lot of fun and get to see the wonderful Flint Hills of Kansas,” Ryan said.

For more information, go to [www.mogageo.com](http://www.mogageo.com).

Let’s go hunting. No, not deer or turkey. In this case, we are using GPS technology to hunt down and find a geocache. We commend Ryan Semmel for making a difference by promoting the practice of geocaching. Not only are they finding geocaches, they are finding a way to promote rural Kansas as well.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.