

# Dogs`N Roses

**M**apping utility data points in residential areas is not like working in a war zone but neither is it a walk in the park. Relating to collecting data points, two cornerstones of private property ownership include: one's personal need for aesthetics, and the need for home security. People want their homes to look good and they want them to be safe.

A typical data collector or city meter reader could not agree more as we readily identify with each of these needs. These jobs quickly come into direct conflict with the two noted basic homeowner needs of savage landscaping and over-zealous guard dogs. Even with these challenges present, it remains a KRWA number one priority to

KRWA Mapping. Having to hunt for the point, clear a way for the data recorder to stand for a reading, and doing so without damaging the shrub or bush are all

beautiful, but there's not a meter to be seen. It's time to beat the bushes – all day long. Some utility workers who read meters in rural areas do so from a vehicle and use

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tedious detours in the process of completing a job quickly and accurately.

One KRWA GPS mapping and data point collecting project currently under way is in a city where residents love their trees and shrubs. A tree lined street alive with color from lilac, forsythia and Bradford pear trees and shrubs is

binoculars to view the meter. That would never work in this city.

It is easy to question the placement of some of the trees and shrubs, especially those thorny rose bushes growing on all four sides of a gas meter. Are residents trying to keep the meter from being read? Do those thorns make the reader guess instead of braving the thorns

Dan Byers  
GIS/GPS  
Mapping Tech

respect the homeowner's property and pets encountered in the course of our work.

### Creative meter camouflage

Landscaping is a fix for hiding that hideous looking gas meter or manhole cover. Green thumbs

triumph over utility companies! Homeowner fixes come in the form of bushes, shrubs, ornamental trees, yard art, and the number one domestic thorny sawbrush nemesis, climbing rose bushes—on a trellis! If it will hide an ugly electric meter, and be impervious to human approach, it's been planted.

From a meter reader or data point collector point of view, these shrubs are obstacles that play a major role in everyday work at



*A not so friendly greeting from this hundred pounder would cause a dilemma for any meter reader or data collector. The outcome would ultimately involve more time spent in repeated visits and phone calls to get the meter read and data point recorded.*



Dan Byers records the data point of a "hidden manhole" after the field of corn was harvested.

on hands and knees to peek at the dial? That is a bit of paranoia showing but some special landscaping that turns up makes one wonder.

In more rural areas or at the edge of some cities, sewer manholes can be hidden in cornfields or wheat fields with the season's crops planted over and around, completely hiding them from sight. In one instance last

fall, the city meter reader accompanying me suggested we wait until the farmer had finished harvesting the field before we thrash around in the entire north end of the field looking for that manhole. A week later, with the corn harvested,

the elusive manhole was found right where it was supposed to be. Just because they are not visible at the time, all points need to be recorded in order to complete the mapping process.

#### Hi there, Toto!

Bushes and shrubs are slow speed detours but dogs are the fast movers – a rose bush with a powerful, high-speed thorn delivery system. This is a detour that meter readers and data collectors are always wary of. They aren't all little Toto house

dogs, but many times are hundred-plus pounds of security with an attitude, guarding the castle or gas meter as the case may be.

Being a dog owner, I try to teach my dog not to bark at or bite strangers. But if threatened, dogs will usually do what dogs do – protect themselves and their turf. Some people who aren't home all day feel they can trust their dog for extra support to secure their home and belongings when they are away. The problem is the utility meter that needs reading or mapped is usually on that turf, with no one home except for good old Spike.

While working an early spring data collection job on a city gas utility, work was progressing smoothly through the neighborhoods. A 15-pound, little white "Toto" was the first problem. He was chained directly to the inlet pipe of the gas meter. He thought he was a 150-pounder and was not very friendly. In fact, he kept up an attack for quite

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some time, thwarting attempts at distraction to get the point mapped. Those extra minutes spent in distracting the valiant little dog was but one of the dogie detours during the day. Extra minutes add up, costing the system extra money in the final bill. Situations like this could be avoided if local residents would secure their pet in an area where it doesn't interfere with utility workers.

Another instance involved a sewer manhole with a 120-pound, big dog's house planted right on top of it. The manhole was the highest point in the yard – a good vantage point for a watch dog. Mac quickly came to greet us with fangs flashing and furiously barking. His name "Mac" was on a sign above his front door. He hit the end of a 20-foot rope, bending his piece of rebar anchor from vertical to horizontal! Mac wasn't letting anyone into his yard – not that we were wild about wanting to try either.

Many times, an animal cannot be approached safely, even with the best tasting doggie treats available. As in this case, owners were notified and arrangements made for the animal to be away from the meter, costing more time and sometimes a fine for the utility customer if cooperation isn't achieved.

For a meter reader or data point collector's safety sake, animal spray is always carried. The chemical is not something used often or preemptively, but when surprised by an animal inside a fence, it may be the only defense.

Before attributing all the blame to neighborhood flora and fauna, one other hazard often encountered is another one of man's best friends – his automobile. Many times, cars, trucks, trailers, RVs both running

and abandoned are parked over manholes. At least these would be bad boys are pretty tame when not doing 70 mph on the highway.

Despite the many possible detours when doing GPS data

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collection, every attribute in the system needs to be recorded to ensure new utility maps being developed are complete and accurate.

Awareness of these hazards keeps us on our toes while walking down alleys and through back yards on these nice spring and early summer days. We are also very aware of the need to protect the pets and property of those customers we serve in the GIS/GPS mapping process.

We're not just whining about rose bushes and puppy dogs. After all, the meter reader and mail man have been negotiating these detours for years. When being approached by a stranger carrying a 7- ft. pole with gadgets hanging all over it, any normal German shepherd might get a little upset. A good understanding of animals, concise communication with homeowners and a sense of humor gets our maps made and made right. We can sure do this – if we occasionally stop and smell the roses!

*Dan Byers has recently left KRWA to follow more closely his*

*degree in Agricultural Technology received recently from KSU. He will relocate to Hesston, Kansas where he will work at AGCO Industries. He will be working with the GIS/GPS systems on combines*

*designed and manufactured by AGCO and will be following test machines north from Texas during the year's wheat harvest.*



*Here it is! The meter is finally found – on the other side of the fence and behind the rose bush.*

*"I've enjoyed working on a great team here at KRWA and have met wonderful people during my travels," Dan lamented.*

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