

## Mission Impossible

By Glen W. Cameron, C.E.T.

Every point that you have been collecting in the field via a total station has been imported onto one layer in AutoCAD and editing of the points is Impossible!

Your Mission, if you choose to accept it, is to master the ability that Softdesk has to control the layers that your points are imported on. Along with placing the points on many different layers, you can also place symbols on those points and have those symbols on their own layers too.

This feature is called "Description Keys" in Softdesk. Description Keys allow you to take a point that has a description, either numeric or alpha-numeric, and funnel that point to a set layer. Each description can be set up independently and the points can be grouped onto layers, making them easier to work within all the Softdesk modules.

To start with - let's say you have a description called TREE in your total station (or numbered 120 in some models that accept numeric entry only), and you need this description changed to 10"DIA. TREE. You want all the tree points placed on a layer called VEGETATION. A symbol called TREE-10 is required on the final plan and that symbol must be on the layer VEG-SYMBOL. This sounds like an impossible task but have no fear, Softdesk has come to the rescue.

Under the points menu in any of the Softdesk modules, you will find an option at the bottom of the menu called Description Keys. When you select the ADD option, you will be prompted for several pieces of information. Below is the example I mentioned above;

Description key to add: TREE (or 120)  
Description: 10"DIA. TREE  
Layer name: VEGETATION  
Symbol name: TREE-10  
Symbol Layer: VEG-SYMBOL

After adding this description you can go ahead and define all the other point

layers you require, each with their own symbols. There is no limit to the number of description keys that can be set up in Softdesk.

Once you have set up all your description keys, you still have to tell Softdesk that you wish to use these keys. To do this you must go to the points pull down menu and select the point defaults option. In this option you have to be sure to select the box, down near the bottom left corner of the dialogue box, that says Description Keys. When selected, the keys will be used as you have entered them. If not selected, the keys will be ignored and the points will all be placed on the current layer. (Back to where we started.)

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Now that you have turned the description keys on, any point being imported from a total station or any point entered by hand, with a description matching one of the description keys, will now behave based on how that key is defined. One other important thing to know is that the blocks being inserted by the description keys must be located in one of two places. The first and by far the most popular, is to create a separate drawing in AutoCAD for each symbol and save this symbol in the directory, C:\AD-CADD\CIVIL\SYMBOLS. Softdesk will automatically find the drawing and import it as required. The second method would be to save the blocks in a prototype drawing, however this is not the desired method because the drawing size could become prohibitively large.

The description keys are stored in a file called DCA.DSC and normally found in the directory C:\AD-CADD\CIVIL. This can be handy to

know because you can edit this file in DOS or WINDOWS. Just make sure that any changes you make maintain the format shown in the file. You can also have multiple files set up with your descriptions being mapped to different layers for different clients. To do this, copy the correct file on top of the DCA.DSC file before importing any points and the keys in that file will control how the points are imported. You may want to name your files based on the client, such as BELL.DSC or HYDRO.DSC. As long as you keep the originals safe, you can set up as many different ones as required and use whichever one you need for your job by copying the file on top of DCA.DSC.

Now that you have set up your description keys, the next MISSION IMPOSSIBLE will be to be sure to use the correct descriptions on the points you collect. Good Luck!

If you are unable to complete this mission, remember that there is help available at your Authorized Softdesk Training Center.



*"Tips and Tricks" has been brought to you by Glen W. Cameron, C.E.T. Glen is the Manager of Software Support and Training at Northern Survey Supply in North Bay, Ontario. Northern Survey Supply is one of two Authorized Softdesk Training Centers in Ontario. Glen has been instructing on and supporting the Softdesk, MicroSurvey and AutoCAD programs for over 7 years now. Glen has travelled from Yellowknife to Bermuda, Newfoundland to Manitoba and extensively throughout Ontario supporting and training on those programs. Glen graduated from St. Lawrence College - Kingston, with honours in Civil Engineering Technology, and has worked in the field, surveying for several years. With his practical experience as well as the extensive, professional training and technical support he provides, his "Tips and Tricks" will undoubtedly assist even the more experienced users!*