

## Difficulty Against Preference Rating

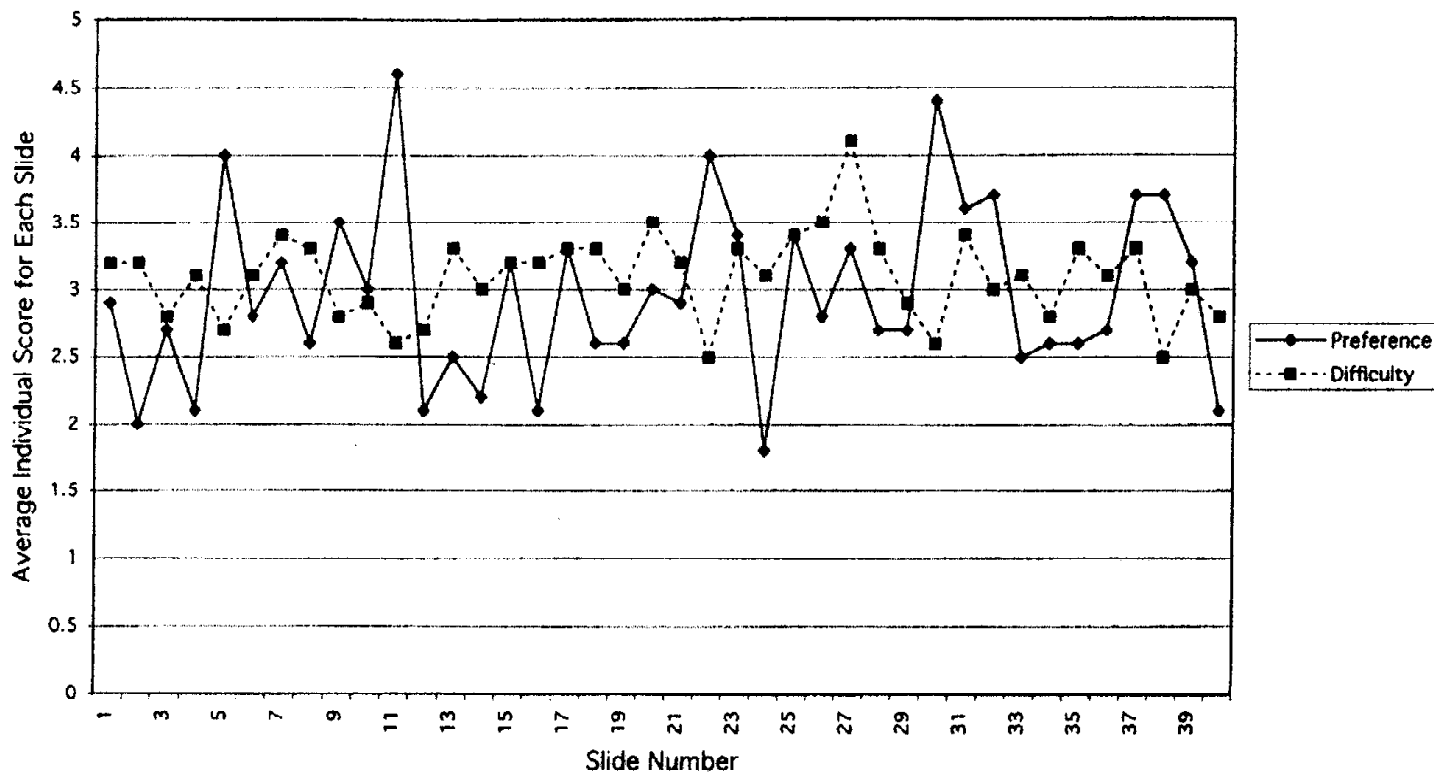


Figure 3.4 Preference rating totals plotted against difficulty of rating totals illustrating the ease with which respondents rated all of the slides and particularly those which were most preferred.

**Understanding** – *comprehending or making sense of a scene*

**Exploration** – *being held by the setting, being attracted by or pulled toward sources of additional information*

Coherence and legibility contribute to the ease of comprehending a scene and belong to ‘understanding’. Both mystery and complexity concern information available for further/future processing and so fall within ‘Exploration’. A scene with high levels of all four factors will be highly preferred, but the relationship between the individual factors and preference is not a simple linear one. For example, high levels of complexity alone will not necessarily predict a preference: a landscape without a degree of coherence and/or legibility will be difficult to make sense of, and confusion does not tend to generate positive responses.

Kaplan’s matrix permits analysis of scenes for their informational components rather than inferring preference at a level of whole biomes like savanna or deciduous woodland. It considers what the scenes might ‘afford’ the individual viewer at a given moment and at a perceptual processing level has more in keeping with Gibson’s (1979) affordance theory of perception rather than that provided by concepts of ‘biome’ or habitat. When tested, traditional ‘savanna’ scenes do score highly on all matrix factors, particularly coherence. This result, however, is due to the intelligibility of savanna scenes at a fundamental perceptual processing level rather than at a hardwired perceptual content level, as some evolutionary psych-

ologists (see Cosmides *et al* 1992) would have it. Kaplan’s information-processing approach allows for much greater flexibility in the individual’s ability to make sense of his/her environment.

### *Environmental preference and the Makapansgat landscape*

Makapansgat offers a highly variable landscape. The terrain surrounding the Cave of Hearths is mountainous and broken with dramatic seasonal fluctuations in vegetation density that can severely limit visibility. The preference matrix model was applied to this variable landscape using a number of original field experiments involving monitored way finding and route choice to designated points in the landscape. Specific route logs and photographic records are still being processed, but initial results on the validity of the framework have been generated using a standard questionnaire methodology adapted from Woodcock (1982). Forty black and white slides of scenes representing the diversity of the Makapansgat landscape were rated for preference, and for the difficulty of rating for that preference, by 125 student subjects. The scenes were also rated by a panel of independent judges for their levels of the four matrix factors.

The results show a marked preference for some scenes over others, with the most and least liked exhibiting low rating difficulty scores (Figure 3.4). These scenes are also characterised by informational factor levels consistent with