

Little Fish

By Roger Pinckney



John Jensen with an ice fishing "jigging stick". The pike is an integral part of the piece.

neer family though till spring.

In the far reaches of the North Country today some still spear because they need the meat. Others spear because they need the link with their brave and frigid forebears. Indeed, there is a magic out there on the winter lake—the woodstove humming and the ice grumbling underneath, and the wind whispering ancient secrets around the cracks in the shanty door.

Such magic inspires the art and tradition of the 'dark house spearing decoy'—the current rage in the wildly appreciating (as in... upwardly spiraling prices) sporting collectibles market. Old or new, spearing decoys fall into two types—(1) realistic decoys and (2) decoys all red and white and yellow and sometimes even metalflake-glittery like some wild, chain-store bass plug. Properly inspired, pike will hit either type—the former because they are hungry, and the latter because they are probably offended by the color scheme.

beat hands down. Sneak out on the ice, saw a hole the size of a card table, wrestle out the slippery slab, slide a darkened shanty over the hole, and start jigging with a fish decoy. The sunlight comes down through the ice; the light comes back up through the hole, and a big fish ghosts into view like on some

video fishing game.

It is a genuine Old Indian Trick. They broke ice with stone axes, covered up with buffalo robes, dangled bits of bone and feathers down through the hole in the ice and took fish with fire-hardened wooden spears. The early settlers learned the trick from the Indians and the results carried many a pio-

Jensens fish schooling up on a shelf.

